The Origin of Aryans

Bongard-Levin

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The distinguished Soviet historian, Bongard-Levin has made a systematic study of one of the most controversial aspects of Ancient Indian History.

The present work being based on comparative linguistics and the findings of their sciences have shown that at one time both the ancient Indo-Aryans and the ancient Iranians lived together. They referred to themselves as "Aryas" and the regions in which they lived as the "Land of the Blessed". This is borne out by the fact that close parallels can be drawn in the languages of the two peoples and their literally works like, *Mahabharata*, *Rig Veda* of the ancient Indians and the *Avesta* of the ancient Iranians.

A lucidly written book, it is aimed to generate interest both amongst scholars of history as well as lay readers.

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THE ORIGIN OF ARYANS

The Origin of Aryans

From Scythis to India

G.M. BONGARD–LEVIN

ARNOLD-HEINEMANN

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by DR. HARISH C. GUPTA

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Various Controversies

The people of India preserve with care the traditions of their ancient, distinctive civilization. Into their modern culture are intertwined the ideas and images of the ancient epic stories. The Mahābhārata *and the* Rāmāyana *are, today, as widely popular amongst the various strata of population as these were many centuries ago. These great poems of ancient India are veritable encyclopaedias of Indian culture, the most valuable source of knowledge about philosophy, religion, mythology, manners and customs. The epic themes have often attracted ancient and medieval poets, dramatists, artists, sculptors ; and do, even now, provide inspiration to art workers. The monuments of ancient Indian belles-lettres, works of Vedic literature, religious-philosophical treatises, anthologies of legal norms, as also the grand epics, the* Mahābhārata *and the* Rāmāyana *are painstakingly studied by scholars, and have been frequently translated into various languages, including also the Russian.*

"POLAR" PHENOMENA

In the epic poems of India, in the fascinating narratives of her sacred legends, one often comes across interesting though *prima facie* extremely odd and obscure information. Described there are phenomena characteristic of Arctic regions but totally unusual for the regions of South Asia. Such, for instance, are conceptions about the fixed Pole star, about the long night lasting a whole six months and the day also stretching to a whole half-year. The ancient bards have sung

about the country where the sun rises only once a year, where there is a six-month day and a six-month night. The epic bards frequently mention the sacred bird, Garuḍa. Before carrying, on its wings, the hermit Galava in quest of eight hundred steeds, as white as the rays of the moon, the bird Garuḍa tells him about the four quarters of the world, including also the North where the seven *Rishis* the goddess Arundhati and Svati ceaselessly revolve round the Pole star (Dhruva) fixed in the sky.

The seven *Rishis* are the seven large stars of the Great Bear constellation ; Arundhati is the Cassiopeia constellation ; and Svati is a bright star in the Bootes constellation. These can be seen high over the horizon only in the northern latitudes. In the regions lying north of 55-56° latitude, these constellations, in winter, do not set at the horizon for one night, but complete a circle whose centre may be roughly taken to be the Pole star.

The Great Bear "rising high in the sky" is found frequently mentioned in the ancient Indian sacred texts. According to the epic works, the place where the great creator-god, Brahmā, "fixed" Dhruva (the Pole star) is located in the centre of the universe, of the heaven. Such a description is possible only of a phenomenon in the northern polar regions, for, it is only at the North Pole that the Pole star stands straight at the zenith.

In these legendary northern lands where the aforementioned stars are seen high in the sky, there also "live ten apsaras". The ancient Indians called them as "born of the rainbow" ; and are these ten, born of the rainbow and shining with its colours, not the poetic image of the *aurora borealis* ? The authors of the Indian legends have mentioned "captivating waters", the "waters gushing down and assuming beautiful shapes". These possibly are the frozen waters ; the *Mahābhārata* mentions them precisely when describing the regions where sun rises for half a year.

ARCTIC HOME IN THE VEDAS

Such evidences in Indian literature have led some scholars to surmise that the original home of the Indians *lay* beyond

the Arctic circle. The location of this "home" has, at times, been ascertained even more precisely—on the shores of the cold White sea, in the north of Siberia. Those putting forward such bold hypotheses have been placing it even in the region of the North Pole itself.

One of the initiators of the "Arctic theory" of the origin of the Indians was Bal Gangadhar Tilak (1856-1920), the well-known political leader of India. His book, *Orion*..., was published in 1893, followed, ten years later, by an extensive monograph, *The Arctic Home in the Vedes*. Many writings of Tilak are devoted to the problems of Indian culture and the oldest stages in the history of the country. An active opponent of the British regime in India and of the colonial historiography which sought to undermine the cultural heritage of the Indians, Tilak endeavoured to demonstrate the distinctiveness of ancient Indian civilization. His works, along with those of his associates, have been of great significance in developing the national consciousness. Besides, the writings of those past years contained many exaggerations, inaccuracies and palpable errors which the contemporary scientific study had to rectify.

More than seven decades have elapsed since the publication of Tilak's *Arctic Home in the Vedas*, but the theory of the "Arctic origin" of the Indians continues to find ardent protagonists and followers amongst the Indian scholars even today. At science congresses one still frequently hears assertions that the ancestors of the Indians had come from beyond the Arctic circle.

In advancing the "Arctic theory", Tilak depended upon some conclusions of contemporary science—geology, palaeontology, Astronomy—that the climatic and natural conditions, the outlines of the continents had undergone substantial changes in the course of various periods of the history of earth. According to this point of view, in the pre-glacial and inter-glacial periods, the climate of the Arctic regions was warm and hence conducive for the vegetable and animal world, and suitable for human habitation and the development of human civilization. Tilak also proceeded from the then fashionable hypothesis of the American scholar, Warren, that the original home of the whole human race was to be sought

for in the Arctic zone.

It was from these positions that Tilak also analysed the data of ancient Indian literature, primarily of the Vedas, the oldest sacred monument of the Indians. Based on such an analysis, he showed that the ancestors of the Indians in the pre-glacial and inter-glacial periods lived in the Arctic regions and that, about ten to eight thousand years ago—this is where Tilak places the last glacial period—moved down to the south because of the onset of cold.

Tilak had drawn his conclusions towards the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century. Are these feasible today ? How is Tilak's theory to be treated now when natural and exact sciences have new materials at their disposal and furnish different dates ?

The question here is not simply as to which dates the pre-glacial and inter-glacial periods should be assigned, or how the variations in the climatic conditions in them or in some other areas of the globe should be understood, or even as to how the information of the ancient Indians about the position of the luminaries should now be evaluated. To these questions the natural and exact sciences also give conflicting answers. The main thing is the conclusions arrived at by such scientific disciplines as history, archaeology, comparative linguistics, historical ethnography. Of course, even here, there remains much that is obscure, hypothetical or contradictory. With the help of varying scientific facts one might seriously argue about the precise areas where the ancestors of the Indians had their original abode, about the time of their formation and movements. But it is quite clear that there can be no talk either of the Arctic regions or of such a remote period as the Ice-age.

Many data of the Vedic and epic literature of India, which Tilak regarded as direct evidence of the abode of the Indians in the Arctic, are now comprehended differently.

MYTH AND REALITY

Nevertheless, in ancient Indian sources, there remain data which are difficult to be assessed except as the reflection of some ideas about the Arctic regions. The medieval scholar, Bhaskaracarya, wrote in his astronomical treatise that, in the

regions at the North Pole, "there is a six-month perpetual day and a six-month perpetual night." Another, still earlier astronomical work, *Sūrya-siddhānta*, mentions that, in these regions, "gods behold the sun after but a single rising during the half of his revolution." Such data are also found in many other Indian scientific treatises and religious texts of late antiquity and early medieval period. It is interesting that these data were scrutinized, in detail, in a special section of his fundamental work, *India*..., by the great Central Asian thinker and scholar, al-Biruni (973-1048), of Khorezm. Biruní had a keen interest in the most diverse sciences and a deep respect for the cultural achievements of many peoples including those of the peoples of India. He studied Sanskrit, took pains to familiarize himself with many scientific and religious-philosophical works of India, held discussions with pandits having knowledge of the ancient cultural traditions.

Biruni's knowledge of numerous Indian sources is amazing. He repeatedly cites a work, *Brahma-siddhānta*, by one of the most prominent mathematicians of ancient India, Brahmagupta (early 7th century) ; and quotes, from it, the following passage about the region at the North Pole ; "The day of the angels who inhabit Meru lasts six months, and their night also six months." Another passage Biruni quotes about this region is from a work of the well-known ancient Indian astronomer, Āryabhaṭa (5th century), according to whom this region—the kingdom of angels—is "situated entirely in the high north, in the cold zone". It is true, the information both of Brahmagupta and Āryabhaṭa about what we may call the phenomena of the "polar night" and the "polar day" is primarily the result of the notions, firmly rooted in Indian literature, about the region in the extreme north. Not for nothing do both the scholars call this land the kingdom of angels, adding, in their texts, the word "supposedly". This is rather the traditional notion or an adopted symbol.

In his chapter, "On the Various Kinds of the Day or Nychthemeron, and of Day and Night in particular", Biruni sets forth the notions of the Indians about the "human nychthemeron" (comprising the usual day and usual night), the "nychthemeron of the fore-fathers" and the "nychthemeron of

the *deva-s* (that is, of the gods)". The nychthemerons of the *deva*-s last a whole year and constitute a day and a night, each lasting half of the solar year. Āryabhaṭa and other Indian scholars wrote about the "nychthemeron of the gods". Bhāskarācarya, while referring to the northern region where "there is a six-month perpetual day and a six-month perpetual night", calls such a day as the "day of the gods". There, he says, the holy beings see the sun after six months when it moves in the northern sphere ; accordingly, the path of the sun during this period is also called the "northern path". Many Indian sources use the term *uttarayana* as synonymous of *devayāna* (the path of the gods). Such notions go back to a considerably remote period ; these were prevalent long before the golden age of ancient Indian mathematics and astronomy.

It is possible that such ideas are also presented in the most ancient monument of Indian literature—the *Ṛgveda*, an anthology of sacred hymns, composed not later than the 10th century B.C. The nature of this anthology of religious texts should, of course, be taken into account. The hymns have a quite specific purpose—to sing praises unto gods and to invoke their help for getting wealth, health, prowess, and protection from enemies. The meaning of many passages in the hymns of the *Ṛgveda* is still not quite clear, and scholars differ in their treatment of a number of hymns on the whole. And, it is difficult to assert with confidence that when the *Ṛgveda* mentions about the end of the period of darkness and the beginning of the "path of the gods" (*devayāna*), that is, of the bright time, or about the "path of the gods being near" with the appearance of the dawn, the reference here is precisely to that "path of the gods" when sun does not set for half a year.

But the same notions are also met with in subsequent Vedic literature—Brahmanas, Aranyakas, Upanishads, dating from before the middle of the first millenium B.C. In these we find more definite information : the day is the "path of the gods", the night is the "path of the forefathers" ; "when sun, turning to the north, is in the northern sphere, it is among the gods when it turns to the South, and is in the southern sphere, it is amongst the forefathers" ; the "path of the god" (*devayāna*), or the "northern path" (*uttarayana*), begins with vernal

equinox. Such a statement is qualified by a still more precise indication : "A year (human) is one day of the gods", comprising a day and a night.

What is meant by such definitions is well seen from the following passage of the *Manusmṛti* [Laws of Manu] : "A year (human) is a day and a night of the Gods ; thus are the two divided, the northern passage of the sun is the day and the southern the night". *Manusmṛti* (2nd century B.C.—1st century A.D.) is a code of legal norms, regulating the private and social life of the Indians. And, nonetheless, it contains this interesting evidence.

We also find similar references in the epic poems. Here, these form a part of the legendary narratives about the heroes, events, lands. Here is one of the accounts of the fantastic region in the distant north, where "those heroes contemplated entry into darkness and exit therefrom, the rising and setting of the radiant sun, the extermination of darkness, and where the day and the night were each equal to a year. In this region, where the heroes of the *Mahābhārata* were, one could see how high the Great Bear rises in the sky, how along with other constellations, it revolves round the Pole star fixed in the sky. And here is another account of the same enigmatic region : Here, the "golden-haired sun rises every half-year", and the "still waters assume forms of beautiful adornments".

Thus, we have, before us, not merely casual, fragmentary pieces of information, but a firm, lasting tradition of transmission of a definite cycle of notions, though these already had no real basis for the epic bards. These appear as elements of a myth and are linked with other mythical images and themes. The "Arctic" details cited are linked with the narratives of gods and heroes and of their immortality.

The question naturally arises : Are not the "polar" ideas as imaginary as the gods, mythical personages, and the "other life"? Is there a criterion which enables us to sift, in these myths, the fantastic from the real, the purely legendary from the probable ? We have, before us, an interesting, complex problem which the scholars of history, folklore and literature so frequently encounter—the problem of correlation of the myth and the fact, and of the legend and the reality.

Historical Facts

THE ARYAS

Before we pass on to the subject-matter of the myth, it is necessary to turn to facts of history. The tribes which had, at one time, in the past, come to India, and called themselves Aryas, played an important role in the formation of the modern Indian people. Spreading on the territory of northern India, they mixed and assimilated themselves with the native population. The Vedic hymns, the *Mahābhārata*, the *Rāmāyana* and many other works of Indian literature were composed in their languages and dialects, which also formed the base for such modern languages of India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka, as Hindi, Urdu, Bengali, Sinhalese, Marathi, Gujarati, Sindhi.

Along with Iranian, these form the Indo-Iranian branch of the Indo-European group of languages—one of the most numerous linguistic families of the world, covering the Slavonic, Germanic, Romance, Lettish, Lithuanian and a number of other living and dead languages. These languages have many common features even today, though these had a still greater affinity in the olden days when the tribes which spoke these Indo-European languages lived in close proximity to each other and constituted, according to some scholars, a single group of tribes with a single language.

Close affinity of the Indo-European languages was shown already in the first half of the 19th century when there emerged a remarkable branch of the linguistic science, "Comparative Indo-European Linguistics". A strict scientific research methodology evolved by this school made it possible to establish many laws in the development of individual languages at

various stages of their history, and a system showing mutual affinity between the representatives of the vast Indo-European linguistics family. The conclusions arrived at by comparative historical linguistics about the affinity of the languages of the Indo-European peoples have brought to fore a whole host of new problems of the most ancient history of these peoples, of their origin, economic structure, social, political order and culture. A pivotal place is held by the problem of the period and region of their joint habitation - their ancestral home.

The Aryan tribes which came to India were, in linguistic and cultural respects, particularly close to the tribes of the Iranian group. At the dawn of their history, both these tribes offered worship to the same gods (the benevolent god, Mitra; the mighty thunderer, Indra, the protector of the brave warriors), sang identical sacred hymns, cherised similar myths and legends about their favourite epic heroes ; at ritual ceremonies and festivities the priests prepared intoxicating Soma, the holy drink of the gods and the immortals. In their light war-like chariots, their warriors routed their enemies in war, and held competitions in times of peace.

Remarkably similar were the social structure of these tribes, the social division into military aristocracy, priests, free community members, the respective ideological notions and legal forms. Each social group was associated with a specific colour (priests with white, military aristocracy with red, etc.) and with one of the three planes of cosmos into which both the Indians and the Iranians divided the existing world—the sky, the space between sky and earth, and the earth. The extant anthologies of sacred hymns—the Vedas of the Indians and the *Avesta* of the Iranians—are very close to each other in language, mythological images, and in the matter of numerous themes.

Both the Indian and the Iranian tribes called themselves "Aryas" and their countries "Aryan". The term "Arya" is applicable only to the Indo-Iranian tribes and peoples. Use of this term for designating the Indo-European (and primarily the Germanic) peoples has no scientific basis. As self-appointed names, the words "Arya", "Aryas" are met with only in the Indo-Iranian languages. This is how the authors of the Vedas and the epic works, the composers of the *Avesta*, and the authors

of the old Persian inscriptions called themselves. From the word "Arya" come the names of various Indian and Iranian tribes and regions. The central part of India, the valley of the sacred river, Ganges Ganga, was, in the ancient times, called Āryavarta - the "land of the Aryas'. The modern name "Iran" is also of the same origin.

All these common features are the heritage of that remote period when the ancestors of the Indian and Iranian tribes lived side by side in the same territory. The given conclusion is universally accepted in science, and proceeds from the recognition of the historical reality of the "Indo-Iranian unity". But where precisely the ancestral home of the Aryas was, is a question hitherto unresolved and evoking lively discussions. It is directly linked to the problem of the ancestors of the Indo-European peoples as a whole, and can for the present be dealt with only in the most general terms.

A comparison of the date of various Indo-European languages makes it possible to recreate, in somc measure, the vegetable and animal world, the climatic conditions and the landscape of the areas where the ancestors of the Indo-European peoples could have lived during the period of their joint habitation. These materials make us exclude the Arctic and the immediately adjoining regions as well as the warm regions of the Mediterranean Sea and South Asia. Other regions which should also be taken into account are those of the spread of the Indo-European peoples in the historical period—from the Celtic tribes of the British islands and France to the Aryas of India.

But the data of comparative linguistics and archaeology, nevertheless, do not, as yet, allow to ascertain precisely where the original home of the Indo-Europeans was. It is sought for in the Northern and Central Europe, Balkans, North Black Sea region, the southern Russian steppes and further to the East, in Kazakhstan and Central Asia. The period of Indo-European association goes back to far antiquity. Later, after this unity had been "lost", various groups of the Indo-European tribes settled down over vast areas. But it is also controversial as to when and on what territories the formation of the ancestors of the Aryan peoples separated from the Indo-European communities took place. The ancestral home of the Aryas is

placed in areas as far removed from each other as these ranging from the lower stretches of the Danube and Central Europe to Altai and the Indian borders. Particularly current among the scholars is the theory of the Central Asian origin of the Aryans. The numerous protagonists of this theory believe that Central Asia was precisely the place of formation of the ancient Aryan tribes, of the shaping of their civilization, spiritual culture and epics. The view that the earliest home of the Aryas was India is widely prevalent in the world of Indian scholarship. And yet many data, primarily those concerning the spread of the ancestors of the Indo-European tribes from amongst whom the Aryas originated, are at variance with such a view.

Iran, too, was not the original home of the Aryans. Already, in the second millenium B.C., this territory was inhabited by a people belonging to a totally different ethnic group. It was only later that the tribes which spoke the Iranian languages and called themselves "Aryas" appeared here. From where and by which routes these people came to Iran is still not quite clear. The Persian, Tajik, Kurdish, Ossetic, and number of others belong to the present Iranian group of languages. Far vaster was the area where the Iranian tribes had spread in the antiquity. It covered the territory extending from the North Black Sea region to Eastern Turkestan.

SCYLAS'S RING

Old burial mounds left by the Scythians and their kindred tribes have been excavated in many areas of Ukraine and Kazakhstan, Volga-Ural steppes and Altai. These mounds have yielded the most valuable materials which help in forming an idea of the mode of life of the ancient population of these territories, its social structure, culture and art.

The monuments of art found in the Scythian burial mounds are preserved in various museums of the world, especially in the Soviet Union. Many of these are found especially in the so-called "animal style", and are distinguished by fine skill, perfection of form, expression and expressiveness of style. Such articles were discovered already in the 18th-19th centuries, in the large

burial mounds of Ukraine and Northern Caucaus, and later, also further on in the East, in Central Asia, in the Pamirs, Altai and Sayans. Thanks to eternal frost, in Altai, not only objects of metal but also wonderful images on wood, leather, cloth and even on tattooed bodies of the leaders of the Altai scythians are found well preserved under the masonry of the burial mounds. Objects akin to the products of the scythian "animal style" were also found in the north-western Iran near the city Sakiz (the so-called Sakiz (storehouse) of the end of the 7th century B.C.)· The monuments in the "animal style" evoke enormous interest, and copious literature is devoted to them. But the question of the sources, modes of development and origin of this art still remains unsettled. In South-Eastern Europe, articles of this type appeared from the end of the 7th to the beginning of the 6th century B.C. These were found in the burial mounds of the North Black sea region and of the Kuban area together with the objects of the West Asian style (Urartu, Assyrian) discovered there. These mounds, obviously, are raised over the graves of the leaders of the Scythians who, in the 7th century, led campaigns in West Asia

It was these tribes of the North Black sea region who called themselves Scythians (this is also how they were known to the peoples of West Asia). Later, the Greeks used this epithet "Scythians" for other Eurasian tribes with like modes of economy, way of life and culture. The Black Sea Scythians built a powerful political alliance headed by the tribe of "Royal Scythians."

The immigrants from the Hellenistic world settled themselves on the northern shores of the Black Sea in the neighbourhood of the Scythian tribes. They first came for trade in the 8th-7th centuries B.C. but, later, founded a number of settlements like Olivia (at the estuary of the river Bug), Panticapaeum (modern Kerch) etc. These Greek cities were closely connected with the local population. Usually, the Scythians treated settlers well, traded with them, and appreciated the fine handicrafts received from them. The Greeks kept a close watch over the events transpiring in the land of the Scythians, and took interest in their customs, traditions and religion. The works of ancient authors contain much information on Scythia. Espe-

cially important is the work of Herodotus who had visited Olivia and talked to the Scythians. The world of scholarship has, however, been often sceptical of the veracity of many accounts of Scythia, including those given by Herodotus.

The modern archaeological findings have, however, corroborated the authenticity of the reports on the customs of the Scythians and concrete episodes of their history. The story of the Scythian king, Scylas, may serve as an example.

Scylas was the son of king Ariapithes from a non-Scythian wife who had initiated her son into Greek language and learning. He had a disposition for Hellenistic customs and often visited Olivia. Scylas used to leave the detachment accompanying him at the city walls and order the gate to be closed so that the Scythians could not know how he spent his time. Scylas lived in Olivia as an Hellenist ;—dressing himself in Grecian garments and offering sacrifice to the Greek gods. When he was admitted to the secrets of the god Dionysus, one of the inhabitants of the city, with sneer, told this to the Scythians who were awaiting their chief at the city gates. He led them stealthily to a tower from where they saw the king revelling in Bachhic mystries. This made the Scythians break out into revolt, dethrone Scylas and make his brother the king. Scylas flee beyond the Danube to the king of the Thracians. The new ruler of Scythia started a war against Thracia. The Thracian and Scythian troops met not far from the Danube, but their kings concluded a treaty whereby Scylas was handed over to his rival brother and beheaded. "Thus rigidly do the Scythians maintain their own customs, and thus severely do they punish such as adopt foreign usages,—writes Herodotus, concluding his narrative.

Herodotus is the only one from whom the story of Scylas came to be known. However, scholars had hitherto not been sure whether this narrative was authentic enough and whether Scylas had really lived. But, recently, an old golden ring was discovered in the Romanian village, Dobrogea (between the lower stretches of the Danube and the Black Sea). The stylistic charecteristics of this ring have made the scholars date it to the 5th century B.C. - that is to the time, according to Herodotus Scylas lived. The name of Scylas is found engraved on this

ring in Greek letters, and a goddess with a mirror in her hands is seen sitting on a chair or a throne.

Such a theme is known from many objects of Scythian art. Often, there is a Scythian leader in front of a goddess sitting with a mirror in her hand. Such scenes symbolize the receiving of power by the Scythian king from the deity. The sitting goddess is obviously Tabiti, whom, as Herodotus mentions, the Scythians honoured "above all other deities" and called the "queen of the Scythians."

The place where the royal ring has been discovered coincides with the area where, according to Herodotus, Scylas died. Whether this ring had been lost or thrown away by Scylas himself while escaping from his persecutors, or had been removed from his hand before execution, can give rise to various conjectures, though these are not of any consequence for us. Far important for our purpose is another, still unsolved riddle of the ring : in addition to the name of Scylas, some other words are also written thereon -in Greek alphabet, but not in Greek language. This possibly is the Scythian language. The inscription is yet to be deciphered and may possibly provide answers to some other hitherto elusive questions

SCYTHIANS, SARMATIANS, ALANS, OSSETIANS

With the exception of this, and may be, of one or two other short inscriptions in Greek alphabet, no monuments of the written language of the Scythians themselves have come down to us. Views expressed have been diverse. Already, in the 19th century, there have been heated controversies on the language of these people. It was, for instance, believed that the Scythians belonged to a Turkic or Mongolian race. Much time elapsed before it became clear that the language of the Scythians belonged to the Indo-European family of languages, toits Indo-Iranian branch. Such a conclusion was initially drawn on the basis of a study of some names of the Scythians mentioned in works of the ancient writers. It was established that these names were Iranian and had been formed from words which were then already known from the ancient Iranian written monuments like the *Avesta*.

Linguistic analysis of personal names in Greek inscription from Hellenistic cities of the North Black Sea region yielded important data on the language of the ancient population of the Black Sea steppes, of Scythians and their kindred Sarmatians (Sarmatae). These incriptions, thoroughly investigated by V.V. Latyshev and other scholars, yielded copious onomastic materials. Greek apart, a large number of personal names of quite a different origin, belonging to the local non-Hellenistic population, are mentioned in them. In these, many indisputably Iranian names were found already towards the close of the 19th century. Great service in the ascertaining of this fact was rendered by the Russian scholar, V.F. Miller (1848-1913). He was also able to show specific affinity between the language of the Scythian-Sarmatian tribes and Ossetic language, one of the modern Iranian languages. Study of Scythian-Sarmatian onomastics progressed successfully in the next decades. The number of names with reliably established Iranian etymology multiplied owing to the studies of the German scholar, M. Vasmer, Hungarian orientalist, J. Harmatta, and, above all, of V. I. Abaev, the Soviet scholar of Iranian studies. Professor Abaev ascertained the meaning of a number of hitherto incomprehensible Scythian names and summed up the results of his studies in his work entitled *Scythian Language*—in Russian and in works on the history of the Ossetic language and culture.

Along with personal and tribal names, the ancient geographical names from the territory of Scythia were also analysed. Till this day, such rivers as the Don, Dnieper, Dnester, bear names connected with the ancient Scythian world. These go back to the Scythian word "Danu" (later, "Dan" - "river"), known also in other Iranian languages including the modern Ossetic ("Don"-"river"; "water").

In the ancient literature, the Don is always referred under the name of "Tanais". The Greek "Tanais" is also connected with the word "Dan". In the root of the modern name, "Dnieper" (D'n"pr", according to old Russian orthography), lies the more ancient "Dan-apr" (in Greek rendering: Danapris' - "the river deep"). From the word "Dan" also comes the name of the Dnestr (D'n'str', in old Russian), testified as "Danastris", Danaster', by the Byzantine and other sources of antiquity.

The name of the river Prut which, according to Herodotus is called "Porata" in Scythian, is also connected with the Ossetic word "ford" (—a large river; a sea)—the modern Ossetic 'f' properly comes from the more ancient 'p', and 'd' from 't'.

Herodotus also mentions other rivers of Scythia. Not all of them have, of course, retained their original names to this day. Such, for instance, is 'Pontikapa' (one of the rivers between the Dnieper and the Don). Its name is made up of the words "panti" (—path) and "kapa" (fish)—the former existed in a number of Indo-European languages, including the Iranian and the Indian, and the latter is known only from such Iranian languages as were akin to the Scythian, for example, Ossetic. The same name "fish-path" was, in olden times, also obviously given to the kerch strait on whose shore the Greek colony, Panticapaeum, had been founded (a careful study of this city has been made by the Soviet archaeologists). Already, in the Scythian period, the Azov Sea and the Kerch strait were known for their abundance of fish. This is repeatedly mentioned in the old sources. Thus, Demosthenes, for instance, in his judicial speeches, had referred, more than once, to vessels loaded with salty fish and sailing from Panticapaeum, though this famous ancient Greek orator has been charged with being of Scythian origin, for his grandmother was a Scythian, married to a Greek who lived in the Black Sea region. The very name "Black Sea" also goes back to the distant Scythian period. Its ancient Greek name is "Pontus Euxinus"—that is, "Hospitable Sea". But Euxinus', meaning "hospitable", is here a later Greek rendering of a much earlier 'Axenos' (inhospitable, in Greek) as the Greek poet, Pindarus, and the tragedian, Euripides, still call the Black Sea as "Pontus Axenos". And this name comes from Akhshain (the letter 'sh', which is not there in Greek, was taken as 's'). This word, known in many Iranian languages, including the Ossetic, means "dark", "dark-grey", "dark-blue". Here there is not simply an echo but a direct relationship between the Greek "Axenos" and the Iranian word "Akhshaln". In the olden days, the Black Sea is known to have been called, in Iran as the "Sea of the Akhshens" (from more ancient "Akhshain").

These and many other data leave no doubt that the Scythians and the Sarmatians belonged to a race of the Iranian

speaking peoples. The scholars have also made a deep analysis of the Scythian legends and stories that have come down to us from the ancient Greek and Roman authors. There is much that is common in the religion, mythology, epics of the Scythians and of other Indo-Iranian peoples who inhabited India, Iran and Central Asia. And now even the themes and images of the national Ossetian epic, *Narty*, have direct parallels in the ancient literature *of India and Iran*. In the **Narty** are found many features relating to the religious and mythological conceptions, concrete peculiarities of life and traditional customs of the Scythians.

Penetrating deep into the centuries, we see what role the Iranian speaking tribes played in the history of the south of our country. In later antiquity and early medieval period, in Byzantium and in Western Europe, they were known under the name of Alans (Alani). This name like the very name of the Ossetians in their epic,-"Allon"-comes from the word "Arya", "Ariad" (rightly "alan" in the Alan-Sarmatian dialects). In the Russian chronicles the "Alan" tribes have been called as "As".

At the time of great migrations of peoples, groups of Alan tribes penetrated far into the west ; they fought on the territory of modern France, Spain, North Africa. Events of that period and subseqent centuries right to the Mongolian conquests strongly changed the ethnical map of the steppe spaces of Eurasia. Many Iranian speaking tribes and nationalities got mixed with such Turkish tribes and peoples as the Pechenegs, Polovtsians, Uzbeks Turkmens and Kazakhs. In ancient times, the steppes of Eurasia were inhabited mainly by the Iranian language speaking tribes. At that time, the general name "Scythians" was applied to them, including the Sarmatians and the Alans, though as already observed, one group of tribes of the South-eastern Europe was called Scythians proper.

POLAR NIGHT BEYOND SCYTHIA

It is about these Scythian tribes who had close contacts with the Hellenistic world that rather more detailed information is preserved in ancient Greek and Roman literature. We are told about various aspects of their life and culture. Their

folk tradition was vast and diverse. They had a rich epos, complex mythological and religious conceptions. This can be judged even from the excerpts which are preserved in the works of ancient authors.

In the fragments of the passages of Scythian epos which have accidentally come down to us we surprisingly find parallels to the Indian stories of "polar" areas. Thus, Herodotus writes that, according to the reports of the Scythians and of the tribes living beyond them, there live, far off in the north, people "who sleep for six months". These reports, apparently refer to northern region where night continues for half a year. On this, more detailed information is preserved in ancient literature. There are, for instance, references to the land located to the north of Scythia, beyond the regions engulfed in thick darkness, subjected to the onslaught of terrific cold and icy influence of the north wind, to the land where a day continues for half-a-year—the inhabitants sow in the mornings reap in the mid-day, and gather the fruit of the trees in the evenings.

The Roman geographer, Pomponius Mela (Ist century A.D.) in his work, *The Description of Earth*,—based on many such earlier works,—mentions about the same regions beyond Scythia at the "North pole itself": "There, the sun rises and sets not daily, as in our case but rising first at the time of vernal equinox. Thus a day continues for six months ; and there is a perpetual night of the same duration".

And this is what Pliny (Ist century A.D.), the well-known historian of nature, writes of the lands north of Scythia: "Here for half a year, there is daylight ... sun rises once a year at the time of summer solstice and sets once at the time of winter solstice. This naturally reminds one of an almost exactly identical passage in the first chapter of the Indian *Manusmrti* Laws of Manu about the land where a year consists of a night and a day,—the northern passage of the sun being the day and the southern the night. These data are in consonance with those of the ancient Indian literature about the land where sun rises once a year and shines for half a year, and is then engulfed in the darkness of the night in the second half.

Like the Indian mathematicians and astronomers who eluci-

date the "polar" information then already known, the astronomical knowledge of their time, interpreted the date of rather more ancient tradition. Pliny, in particular, judging from his words, knew the various accounts of the "polar" phenomena and their various treatments. This is also corroborated by the report of the Roman geographer, Solinus (2nd-3rd century A.D.). Following, in many ways, Mela and Pliny, he, however also quotes other views in this behalf : in the land beyond Scythia, in the distant north "there seem to be two suns—one setting, and the other rising, but" this does not stand to reason. It is assumed that locked there are world axes and the boundary path of the constellations, six-month light and the sun setting only for one day, though some believe that the sun there rises and not daily, as with us, but rises at vernal and sets at autumnal equinox : thus the endless day continues for six months, and there is a continuous night for another six.

The ancient scholars, as we see, have variously treated polar information of the lands beyond Scythia ; but it is more important to pay attention to another thing : Such notions were prevalent long before the period of flourishing of the Roman and Hellenistic science (this is clearly testified, for instance, by the account of Herodotus). In India, too, scholars repeated the ancient tradition, trying to explain it, or accepted the traditional positions as the canon. At times, they like Bhaskaracarya, openly admitted that they did not comprehend the conflicting informations about the "polar" phenomena and were prepared to put them down to ignorant fiction.

Thus, the origin of themes both in the ancient Greek and Roman world and in India should not be put down to purely speculative notions. But how in such a case, is one to explain the origin of these accounts—"conjectures" or "legends"? Did these have any real basis? The land of the Scythians lay far from the polar circle but though, nonetheless, far nearer than India. Can it be that, precisely here, it is easier to ascertain the sources of these legends and concrete geographical panorama ?

TO THE ISSEDONIANS

Ancient Greek and Roman authors, while describing geographical characteristics of lands of the Scythians and their neighbours, furnish data on the polar night region beyond Scythia. These authors usually begin their accounts from the land of the Scythians and then pass over the deep mainland, to the north or north-east, crossing the Tanais (the Don), and continue their narrative right up to the rocky regions in the foothills of the mountains. Along with the description of the location, nature and climate of these territories, the ancient authors also dwell upon the peoples living there, on their customs and manners.

Herodotus has mentioned about the tribes living far beyond Scythia—the Thyssagetae and Tyrcae, engaged in hunting and inhabiting the forest-steppe or forest regions. Eastward from them lived the steppe Scythians, kinsmen of the Black Sea Scythians. Further on to the north, Herodotus writes, the "land is rough and stony." Crossing this barren district one comes to forest regions where dwell Argippaeans, a people who, according to Herodotus, speak a peculiar language and have unusual facial features and strange customs. Not far from them is the home of the Issedonians (Issedones). Many other ancient authors also knew about all these peoples.

The accounts of the remote territories were based primarily on reports which the Greeks got from the Scythians. There having been a trade route from Scythia to north-eastern regions, these areas were well known to the Scythians and Greek settlers of the northern Black Sea region. Herodotus specially stresses the veracity of reports about the areas beyond Scythia right to the land of the Argippaeans. He says that "some of the Scythians have visited them, from whom the story is easily extracted. Some of the Hellenes from the marts of Pontus and Borysthenes [that is, Olvia] have been there too. The Scythians who do go thither, employ seven tongues and seven interpreters thereof." The information of the Greeks about the lands beyond Scythia continually increased. Also grow the geographical horizon of the Hellenes who themselves traded on the route leading to far-off regions. Some of the

Hellenes, probably, specially visited these areas. The narrative of Aristeas about his travels to areas beyond Scythia, in the 7th century B.C., came to be widely known. Inflow of new information about the distant regions beyond Scythia continued even after Herodotus. Fresh data were, for instance, furnished by the logographer, Hellanicus (a younger contemporary of Herodotus), in his work entitled *Scythica*.

With the sole exception of the *Histories* of Herodotus, such works unfortunately, have not come down to us in full. But these have been made use of by other ancient authors having a lively interest in the Scythian world—for example, by the ancient Greek poets, Alcman (7th century B.C.) and Pindarus (6th-5th centuries B.C.), by the well-known geographer and traveller, Hecataeus of Miletus (6th-5th centuries B.C.), by the tragedians, Aeschylus (6th-5th centuries B.C.) and Sophocles (5th century B.C.), by the logographer, Damastes (5th century B.C.), by the physician, Hyppocrates (5th-4th centuries B.C.), by the greatest thinker of the olden times, Aristotle (4th century B.C.), and by many other ancient Greek Roman and Byzantine learned men, poets and writers.

The area of the Black Sea Scythians and their immediate neighbours was fairly well known to the Greeks ; it was the more remote peoples right to the Argippaeans and Issedonians, who were shrouded in uncertainty. Entirely different was the case with the descriptions of the lands beyond those of the Argippaeans and Issedonians. These were supposed to be inhabited by "goat-footed men" and "one-eyed" Arimaspians everlastingly at war with the "gold-guarding griffins". This popular theme inspired Aeschylus to write the following lines in his *Prometheus Bound :*

... ware
the griffins, Zeus's sharp-beaked silent hounds,
And the one-eyed host, the horsemen Arimaspi
Who dwell around the river running gold,
The stream of Pluto.

The rivers flowing in golden beds, the gold guarded by griffins were, in these accounts, linked with the highest mountains—the Rhipaeans, as called by many ancient authors. In a cave in these mountains was the abode of the severe North

wind. Farther on, beyond the mountains, was the sea, or ocean, and the people "celebrated for fabulous wonders", called Hyperboreans by the Greeks.

Here, apparently, is a mixture of reality and conjecture, fruit of fantasy, though not of the Greek authors but of the Scythians and their neighbours whose accounts the Hellenes referred to. Scythians, and many ancient authors after them, believed in the real existence of legendary peoples of the North. The Scythians, however, never claimed that they had been to those distant lands and had seen their inhabitants. Herodotus, viewing things in a sober light, had a cautious approach to the assessment of the accounts of the inhabitants of the North. He reproduced only some of them, and did not consider these plausible.

EAST OR NORTH

Modern scholars have a different approach to the data of the ancient tradition, and place the peoples beyond Scythia differently on the map. More convincing is the position that the trade route from Scythia extended to the forest regions on the Volga and to the regions lying south of the Urals. This view was convincingly established, with the help of archaeological materials, by the well-known Soviet scholar, B. N. Grakov. If such a route is accepted, the Issedonians should be placed somewhere near the Southern Urals or beyond the Urals. It is possible that the name of the Issedonians, or Isseds, is rightly identified with the name of the river Iset' (where the city of Sverdlovsk is now located). In the 17th century, the Isetia region mentioned in the Russian documents was known. In the 18th century, the said regions lying beyond the Urals formed a part of the special Iset province of the Russian state.

According to these conclusions, the high mountains (Rhipaeans), where the Argippaeans and the Issedonians live, are the Urals range. But frequently charted on the geographical map are the regions not only of the Argippaeans and Issedonians but also of the one-eyed Arimaspians, Hyperboreans and even "sharp-beaked" griffins. Usually, these are located far in the east, though sometimes, the Argippaeans are

localized not in the forest round the Volga but in the steppes of Kazakhstan, and the Issedonians—further east to them. The Arimaspians in that case would be placed in the Altai steppes, and the griffins—in the gold-rich Altai. The gold running river of the Arimaspians is linked with the Yenisei, the Rhipaean mountains—with the massive mountains of Central Asia, the "ocean" lying beyond the Rhipaean mountains—with the seas of the Pacific basin. The Hyperboreans living, according to ancient tradition, between the Rhipaean mountains and the ocean, then, turn out to be on the territory of China. Such a version is accepted, for instance, by the British scholar, J. Bolton, in his recent book on Aristeas. In conclusion, Bolton writes that Aristeas who did not return from his second voyage, could have ended his life among the Hyperboreans in China.

Such views are unfounded, and are at variance with the concrete information of the ancient sources about various regions and peoples beyond Scythia. Information shows, for instance, that the route to the distant lands lay through the steppe and then the forest regions. Argippaeans, in particular also cannot be placed in the territory of Kazakhstan or other steppe regions, because they, according to Herodotus and other authors, lived in a forest area. The conclusions of the protagonists of the "eastern direction" directly conflict with the whole system of geographical notions of ancient authors who had placed the distant areas beyond Scythia precisely in the north and not in the east.

One cannot also accept individual arguments to profess that the said trade route extended to distant eastern countries. Thus the objects of Greek export from the north Black sea region in the Scythian period did not reach the remote areas of Asia, but were well known in the area round the Volga right to the basin of the Kama river. In the steppe territories these are found not farther than the modern Orenburg province.

J. Bolton and his predecessors observed that the unusual data of ancient literature concerning the distant lands beyond Scythia and the supernatural visage of their inhabitants (for instance, the one-eyed griffins and their monstrous enemies) find prototypes in the folklore tradition of the central Asiatic

and eastern Siberian peoples. These parallels are indeed of great interest, though they do not at all show that the narratives from the far-off eastern countries had infiltrated to the Black sea Scythians and Greeks. The fact is that these and even more striking analogies can be found in the mythological notions and in the epics of the peoples of Northern Europe and Urals.

It is important that ancient authors have themselves placed the peoples and the lands beyond Scythia, known to them in the north. Many scholars, unfortunately, do not take into account these evidences, or assume that these point only to a rough direction—from the sea deep into Scythia first to the north-east, and further on to the east. But this is what the sources mention. In his work, *About the Peoples*, Damastes stated that "beyond the Scythians dwelt the Issedones" beyond these again the Arismaspians, and beyond Arismaspians were (located) the Rhipaean Mountains from which Boreas blew, and which were never free from snow. On the other side of these mountains were the Hyperboreans extending down to another sea. Boreas is the North Wind (in Greek mythology the god of north winds;) and the sea mentioned here is called another in relation to the Black Sea.

Herodotus also gives more or less the same account from the words of Aristeas "...beyond the Issedonian land live the one eyed Arimaspians, and beyond them are the gold-guarding griffins. Finally beyond them too, live the Hyperboreans by the sea". This sea is northern because further on, in the same account Herodotus directly refers to the "South Sea" (Black Sea). According to the data of the Roman historian and scholar, Pompeius Trogus (end of Ist century B.C., beginning of Ist century A.D.), the territory of Scythia was bounded on the south by pontus euxinus and on the north by the Rhipaean mountains. Pomponius Mela, in his geographical work, in the section on regions lying beyond Scythia mentions that beyond the country of the Argippaeans rise the Rhipaean mountains, and on the other side of these lies the coast, facing the northern ocean. In Aristotle's *Meteorologica* we read : "Under the Great Bear itself (in the extreme north) beyond the farthest limit of Scythia are the mountains called Rhipaeans." In the north precisely are also placed the griffins mentioned by

various authors, including Herodotus,who refers to the accounts of the Scythians. According to Pliny, the Arimaspians live "not far from the place of origin of Aquilon" (North wind, the Roman counterpart of Boreas).

The areas at the Rhipaean mountains, Pliny writes, "are treated unfairly by nature, are shrouded in obscurity, help only in the formation of ice, and are the cold abode of North wind." Pliny and many other authors call this country "feathery", because "here everlastingly falls snow resembling feathers." Already, Herodotus, quoting the Scythian accounts, mentioned that in remote places to the north of Scythia "the earth and the air...are full of feathers.... If anyone has seen a violent snow-storm he will understand what I say. Snowflakes very much resemble feathers."

That country far beyond Scythia, at the Rhipean mountains according to the ancient authors, is engulfed in gloom and darkness. "By its very nature the solitary land enveloped by eternal darkness and completely frozen from the very receptacles of Aquilon", wrote Solinus, "which knows no change of season and receives from the sky nothing but perennial cold." And here is a passage from Sophocles's tragedy, *Oedipus Coloneus (Oedipus at Colonus)* :

Think of some shore in the north the
Concussive waves make stream
This way and that in the gales of winter :
It is like that with him...
Now from the plunging down of the sun,
Now from the sunrise quarter,
Now from where the noonday gleams,
Now from the night and the north (from the Rhipaeans)

Many Greek authors of the 7th to 4th centuries B.C. already described the places at the Rhipaean mountains as regions of cold, snow, darkness. And there, beyond the distant mountains beyond Scythia, they placed the country where "a day lasts six months and there is a night of the some number of months," where "sun rises once a year", where people sleep for half a year.

There are thus no doubts that all these peoples and lands lay not in the east, next to Central Asia and China, but in the

north of Scythia. These should be linked, for certain, with the regions of North-Eastern Europe and Urals.

REAL GEOGRAPHY AND LEGENDARY TRADITION

Judging from the description given by ancient Greek and Roman authors of the route to Argippaeans and Issedonians, the mountains (Rhipaean) located near them could be identified with the Urals. There is, however, also a strong tradition that the Rhipaeans covered the whole space north of the Scythian world. Many ancient authors opine that these occupied the whole of north Europe. Thus, for instance, these are found represented on one of the earliest maps of earth drawn in the 6th century B.C. by Hekataios Milesios (Hecataens of Miletus). Aristotle, placing no reliance in the accounts of the "fabulous" size of the Rhipaeans, did nevertheless, not doubt their existence and assumed that "very many and the largest of all rivers other than Istros flow from them". Istros is the Danube; by other rivers of Europe are meant here the Dnieper, and Don, the great rivers of Scythia. Such conceptions of Aristotle reflect a steady ancient tradition about the relation of these rivers to the mountains in the distant north.

It is clear that the regions where the Dnieper and the Don have their source are not connected with the Urals. But we can see where the Greek and the Scythians erred. They, obviously, proceeded from the actual notion that the great rivers of the South-Eastern Europe from the Dnieper to the Urals flowed from north to south, and that the relief of the place was accordingly raised from south to north (Hyppocratus, Pompeius Trogus, Vergilius and others emphasize that the plains of Scythia rise from south to north). This apparently is the reason for the conception that the entire area north of Scythia is occupied by a mountain range.

On the other side of the Rhipaean mountains, according to ancient authors, there is the great "Northern" or "Scythian" ocean, washing the northern shores of Europe. Sometimes, it is called icy or frozen. In such information of the ancient literature about the regions beyond Scythia one can see the real nucleus : an icy ocean actually lies to the north of Europe.

polar night actually alternates with the polar day in these regions though, of course, the "perpetual" day and night do not continue for half a year.

The scheme of the real panorama going to the north of the areas is somehow also supplemented by the data on their severe climate. In the land engulfed in darkness, there reigns eternal winter and unbearable cold, and snow falls incessantly. But here we again come across something unexpected. The more to the north, the colder ? The region which has in it the riddle of the "polar" notions, placed still farther to the north between the peaks of the Rhipaean mountains and the Northern ocean, is, however, found to have warm climate, free from cold winds and yields abundant fruit. In the meadows and groves of this region where the sun rises and sets once a year is the abode of happy people. The golden peaks of the Rhipaean mountains are so great that they touch the sky; behind them sets and from behind them rises the sun; they touch the stars, and the stars move round them. Thus, there are before us again mythical traits characteristic of the whole cycle of notions of the Rhipaean mountains, an amalgam of the real and the miraculous.

Trying to sum up all this, we may say that located, successively, from south to north, are the regions of actually existing peoples, of the well-known Scythians, right up to those of the Argippaeans and Issedonians. Beyond them, already, are the mythical tribes and fabulous beings living on the Rhipaean mountains ; the regions up to the slopes of these mountains are covered with snow, and are because of severe icy cold impenetrable to human beings. On the other side of the Rhipaeans at their foothills is the expanse of the Grean ocean. On the golden Rhipaean peaks reaching the regions of "polar" day and night and the abode of the "blessed" people.

It is clear that the conceptions of polar regions and Arctic phenomena as prevalent in Scythia did not at all originate from the fact that the Scythians themselves lived there; they lived still farther southwards. But whatever the source of these notions these clearly could not have appeared, amongst the Scythians, as a result of "scientific" abstraction, while, in the case of the Indians, these, as we have seen go back to very ancient tradition.

However, while one can say of the Scythian materials as having been a mixture of the myth and the miraculous with the real and the concrete, the ancient Indian tradition about the "Arctic" phenomena has, already, wholly acquired a mythological tinge. This tradition is fixed in the legends which have been composed and sung on the territory of India itself. But India was not the home of the Aryas, whose ancestors had come here from some areas lying farther to the north. Maybe, they did, sometimes, actually live beyond the polar circle, as believed by Tilak, or did, like the Scythians, inhabit the areas near the regions where some sort of conceptions of the polar regions could have been prevalent. The assumption that the similar legends of the Scythians and the Indians are of the same origin (both belonged to the Indo-Iranian race) is also possible. In that case, the polar themes mentioned in the Black Sea regions and far off, in Indian, must go back to one ancient source. But one cannot give a positive answer to the problems stated merely on the basis of this concurrence of two traditions.

Literary Sources

AGAIN IN INDIA

It is necessary to find out whether or not there are other common features linking the cycle of Scythian "polar" notions with the ancient Indian "Arctic" tradition. For this, we shall turn, once again, to the Indian epic poems, astronomical treatises, oldest religious works.

The *Mahābhārata* has eighteen books, hundreds of chapters, thousands of pages, 170,000 lines(85,000 Ślokas). The tragic story is about the origin and fatal hostility of two kindred families—the Pāṇḍavas and the Kauravas about the battle between them, involoving the tribes of whole ancient, India, accounts of exploits and evil machinations of heroes, the great battle at Kuruksetra. The slow narrative is interspersed with teachings and talks of sages on the gods and on how to serve them, on the duty of man and meaning of life. Wise *rishis* supplement their narratives with brilliant examples with episodes from the lives of gods and heroes, with stories of the near and far-off countries.

And again we come across accounts of the "polar" phenomena in the land which lies somewhere far in the north though the data about the real location of this region are inconsistent and vague. There, however, also exists a "precise" indication, Mount Meru. It is precisely here that there are "half-year day, half-year night", that "one night and one day together constitute a year" and high in the sky are "seen the Pole star fixed by the Creator-god" the constellations of Great Bear, Cassiopeia and Bootes revolving round it, the brilliant ten apsarās born of rainbow (*aurora borealis*) ?

The *Purāṇas*—anthologies of legends about gods, kings, and heroes—frequently mention that, for the holy inhabitants of the Mount Meru, a day lasts six months and so also does the night. At Meru, one day ("day of the gods") is equal to a year [human]. The astronomical treatise, *Sūrya-sidhānta*. states that the sun, after once rising, is visible at Mount Meru for a whole half-year. Bhāskarācarya affirms that "at Meru, there is half a-year perpetual day, half-a-year perpetual night".

The Indian scholars, who considered the earth a globe, placed Meru at the North pole. Still earlier texts place the Meru range in the entire north of the earth from the west to the east, in the distant zone of cold. It is in this land, where the peaks of the Meru shine, that the freezing waters "assume beautiful forms."

The *Mahābhārata* states : "In the northern, shining, stands the mighty Meru...on it is the abode of Brahma; here lives the soul of all things... Prajāpati who created all that is mobile and immobile. The Great Meru is a sinless, happy abode. Here set and again, over the mountain, rise the "seven *rishis*" headed by Vasiṣṭha." The ancient narrators called Meru "immeasurably high, the like of which is not seen anywhere in the world." Its peaks seem to rest in the sky. The omnipotent gods- Brahmā, Śiva, Viṣṇu- live at Meru. The splendid palace of Indra stands here. Here, the mighty god of wind, Vāyu, spreads his dominions; and Soma gifts the gods the sacred drink of immortality.

"Here live gods, asuras, kinnaras, gandharvas, serpents", various divine beings, celestial nymphs. Numerous are the dances of apsaras whirling on all sides, fanned by pleasant, pure air carrying all sorts of fragrances. The white mountain shines with flocks of lovely birds. There are heard voices of assemblies of gods and all godly rishis, like the sounds of the music of the clouds, like the seething ocean.

The marvellous Sūrya, the god of the radiant sun rising over Meru, "gives life and distributes it between all that is mobile and immobile." It never leaves the Meru. "The god driving away darkness with its rays, giving life to the world, Āditya (Sun) freely revolves along this path." Circumscribing Mount Meru from all sides, it again returns to their main peak

called Mandara. Like the, other luminaries also revolve round and these mountains "Day after day, moving in a circle, the sun the moon do *pradakṣiṇā* to this Meru, 0 Kuru! Also, all stars, all luminaries,without exception, Moving in a circle, do *pradakṣiṇā* to Meru, 0 Mahārāja!"

The idea that all luminaries revolve round Meru was universally accepted in ancient Indian tradition. The authors of the Puranic legends call the path of constant motion of sun and stars round Meru a "circle" of all astronomical bodies. And even Brahmagupta, the mathematician and astronomer, expressed the view that Meru "lies under the Pole, and that the stars revolve at its foothills, so that the rising and the setting depend upon it ; thanks to its power, it can conceal and reveal the sun and the moon to earth." The great sage (Muni) Lomasa tells Yudhisthira, the hero of the *Mahābhārata*, an interesting legend about this cosmic role of Meru : Once, the mighty mountain range, Vindhyas (the mountain massif between the Northern India and Deccan), gave way to envy, "seeing how the sun, at the time of rising and setting, encircles Meru. The Vindhyās then said to sun : "As the Lord, every day, goes round Meru, doing *pradakṣiṇā*, let the giver of Light show the same respect to me too" To this, Sūrya replied to the lord of the hills : "I do *pradakṣiṇā* to that mountain not by my own will, this path has been charted out for me by those who created this world."

In the epos, Meru has been called the "Golden mountain"; its summits shine with gold. And at the time of flourishing of ancient Indian science, in the 6th century A.D., the astronomer and geographer, Varāhamihira, wrote that "Mount Meru is made up of golden plinths...between them have been raised trees in abundant effulgence, with fragrant flowers." Rivers flow in golden beds, lakes with golden bottom shine like the moon. The sacred streams, the purest and the most transparent, have their source in these reservoirs, for their waters are carried over the purest gold. Here is the best of the rivers, "the celestial Ganga (Ganges)", "the daughter of Mandāra," the source of all the waters of earth. From here the gods sent great streams into the world of the people.

The Indian legends about the sacred mountains, Meru, are incomparably richer in information on the Rhipaean mountains,

which are known only from fragmentary references of ancient writers. But even these heterogeneous materials provide the basis for new comparisons of the two traditions. Both the Rhipaean mountains and Meru were located in the distant north, these extended along the northern limit of the world. Both of them reach the skies, around their peaks revolve the luminaries. The golden Rhipaean mountains shine like the peaks of Meru. From the Rhipaean mountains, as also from Meru, flow rivers in golden beds, in these mountains even great rivers of the earth have their source.

MILKY OCEAN

"We may now imagine ourselves crossing the Rhipaean mountains and going...to the shore of the ocean." We follow the advice of Pliny, who here mentions the Northern or "Scythian" ocean. To the north of Meru also stretches the Northern ocean, often called the White or Milky ocean.

Giving an account of the region in the north, the great sage and hero, Bhīṣma, says to Yudhisthira : "Northern slope of Meru, the coast of the Milky sea - that is the region." The heroes of the *Rāmāyana* also knew about the Eternal ocean located in the farthest north, alongside the golden-peaked northern mountains reaching the sky. The great watery expanse at Meru is mentioned in various works of ancient Indian literature. While settling in India, the Indo-Aryan tribes had, of course, no knowledge where actually the great northern sea could be. But they spoke of its existence, and repeated the ancient legends about it. The heroes of the *Mahābhārata* themselves link such legends to the themes of ancient mysteries, assuming that these have come down from wise *rishis* from the time of the golden age of the universe—*Krita-yuga*.

While trying to determine where this Northern ocean could be, the commentators of the Indian legends often placed it on the other side of the Himalayas. But the epic account is different. Beyond the Himalayas lie the ranges of Tibet, Hindukush, Pamir... and beyond them are the sandy expanses of Central and Middle Asia, the territories which obviously could not have given rise to notions of a Northern ocean amongst

the Indians. Besides, the Indians had already, quite early, entered into trade and cultural relations with the population of these regions and had concrete information on them. Indian epic legends mention four oceans—the Eastern, Southern, Western and Northern. Of these, the first three were actually known to ancient Indians. By them they meant the Bay of Bengal, the Indian Ocean, and the Arabian Sea. The notions of the fourth, the distant Northern ocean were vague.

"Taking vessels, people go to the Eastern ocean and to the Southern," says Duryodhana, one of the heroes of the *Mahābhārata*, "and, in the same way, they go to the Western ocean. But they do not go to the Northern ocean, for it is not accessible to anybody except the birds." "None, except b'rds," he further repeats",-"ever goes to the Northern ocean."

Numerous and diverse are the Indian stories about distant northern regions, but one can almost always find in these the same "geographical" basis : the Meru ranges rising in the distant north ; on the other side, the great Northern ocean, the Milky sea. In the regions located at Meru were also observed, according to the accounts of Indian narrators, such phenomena as we have all grounds to call "Arctic". All this remarkably reminds of the "Scythian" tradition about the northern regions, the tradition which has followed real geographical basis : the territory where the place is raised to the north, with Ural mountains in the East of this territory, the regions beyond the Polar circle ; the Northern Icy ocean.

Are not the same geographical realities a prototype of the notions of ancient Indians about the great mountains in the distant north, about the "polar" phenomena, about the great "Northern ocean" ("Milky sea") ? We could have replied to this question in the affirmative, if we were sure that both the traditions, the Indian and the "Sycthian", go back to a common heritage of Indo-Iranian tribes.

LAND OF THE BLESSED

"In the north of the Milky sea," the *Mahābhārata* mentions, "there is a large island known under the name of Śvetadvīpa (White island). It is, in the words of the Brāhmins,

situated 32,000 yojanas to the north of Meru. Here dwell fragrant...white men, far from all evil...indifferent to honour or dishonour...marvellous to look at..., full of vital strength, with bones as strong as diamond...enthusiastically engaged in the service of God."

Priests of ancient India, epic bards, authors of sacred *Brāhmaṇas* and *Purānas* knew many accounts about the inhabitants of Meru and regions beyond them. They frequently mention about the happy peoples, living there, "in the region, full of bliss." This region of "bliss" is placed in the White island in the Milky sea to the north of Meru and at its northern slopes, at the coast between the mountains and the Northern ocean. The "sacred abode on the slope of Meru, the lord of mountains", the "Northern slope of Meru, the coast of the Milky sea", - such is the "address" of this region in the *Mahābhārata* and in the number of other works of ancient Indian literature.

High over the evil hangs the region of "eternal happiness." Here it is neither cold nor hot. Covered with grooves and forests the land produces abundant fruit; everywhere there are herds of antelopes and groups of birds, all inhale the scents of flowers. "Here does not live a cruel, senseless man or an outlaw". There can be no wars or combats here. Peoples of this region are all equal amongst themselves, enjoy all favours of life. Fine celestial maids beguile their leisure : "wondrous gandharvas and apsarās dance there, great din is heard of exultant beings". The hearts of the "blessed" inhabitants of the wonderful country are free from evil; divine justice is characteristic of them. This is the region where gods are held in high reverence : all sages (munis) serve them together; or, individually, whispering prayers, they bow their heads and sing praises unto the omnipresent god. "Bearing all the noble marks, shining like the moon," they "immerse themselves in thousand-rays eternal god," "severely mortify their flesh", and "take no food." Here, people live a thousand years — ten centuries, for such, in this region, is the period of service to the gods.

A region of the "blessed" also "existed" beyond Scythia, in far-off northern lands, beyond the Rhipaean mountains.

Ancient Greek and Roman authors call its "happy people" Hyperboreans. These people have been placed "north of the Rhipaean mountians", "beyond these mountains up to another sea" (that is, up to the Northern sea), "on that side of the North wind, at the coast, facing the ocean", ... by Aristeas, Damastes, Hellanicus, Pomponius Mela, Pliny etc.

The region of the "blessed" lies far in the north ; but has a favourable climate, free from harmful cold and hot winds. The earth heated by the summer sun gives plenty of fruit. Its inhabitants live in forests and groves, and lead a happy life in perpetual leisure. No wars take place in their lands, want and sorrow are unknown to them. They, devote a greater part of their time to the service of the gods, worship them separately, as individuals and together. These people are distinguished by a great sense of justice and, compared with all other mortals, live the longest — a whole thousand years. They take only fruit, but can retain their vitality, without, eating any food whatsoever.

"They are perfect in sense of justice, do not use meat in their food, feed on fruits of trees (Hellanicus), "live on the edge of the earth under the protection of Apollo, knowing no war" (Greek epic poet, Ferenicus). And here are lines from an ode, by Pindarus, about the life of the "blessed" people, "making great sacrifices to god" : "The endless banquets and praises of that people rejoice the heart of Apollo, and he laughs ... the cult of the Muses is not alien to the Hyperboreans; from every side come maidens dancing to the sweet notes of flutes ; and, with their hair crowned with golden bay-leaves, they hold glad revelry. The people of this sacred tribe know neither sickness nor baneful age ; but, aloof from toil and conflict, they dwell far off ...".

THE INACCESSIBLE ARCTIC

From this earthly world, only the select few, the righteous, could enter — and that, too, only upon the end of their life — that distant northern region on the heights of the Meru and at its slopes, on the shores of the Milky northern ocean, where was the abode of the gods and the region of the "blessed" people.

Indra had his paradise there : 'those who go there do not again return to this world'. As the ancient Indians believed, only some celebrated heroes or wisest *rishis* could ascend to that region alive. But they did so only miraculously, with divine will. They could also be brought by Garuḍa, the sacred bird, on its wings.

The route to the borders of this northern region was long and difficult, and anyone venturing to cross into it perished at the foothills of the Great mountains. To this "polar" region where the Great Bear, Cassiopeia and Bootes constellations ... revolve round the Pole star fixed in the sky ...

> Entice thousands of coveted delights, O Galava,
> But the man that passeth beyond the point guarded ...
> Is sure to perish, O Galava, the best of the twice-born,
> And none else, 0 Bull amongst Brahmanas, has
> Succeeded in passing beyond this point.

This is what the bird Garuḍa says about the region in the far north.

The *Mahābhārata*, in its section 'Conquest of the Four Quarters' ['Digvijaya-parva'], dwells upon the exploits of the Pāṇḍavas in the four quarters of the world. Arjuna, the best warrior among the Pāṇḍava brothers, directed his troops towards the north. Crossing the Himalayas, he conquered, one after the other, the northern peoples and states, the legendary tribes and kingdoms of fabulous beings. Finally, he came close to the region of the happy northern people. But there came to him 'guards with massive bodies, embodied with great valour and strength, who addressed him in such words : "O Son of Pṛthā [*i.e.* Arjuna] ! ... Go back from here. He who enters this region ... is sure to perish ... there can be no war here. And even if you enter it, you will behold nothing, for with human eyes nothing can be seen here". Upon this, the mighty warrior said : "I shall not enter your land if it is forbidden to human beings". And he retreated back, to India.

Ancient legends held out a warning to those who tried to violate this ban : at the approaches to the region of the Meru mountains there is a desert, a region of darkness inhabited by dreadful monsters : *pisāci*—the wicked being; *vṛddhikas* cannibal

women, wicked monstrous *rākṣasas* ("wicked *raksasas* destroy all that is living, anyone venturing to go by that highest path will be killed by the *raksasas* with darts and other weapons".)

However, we come back to Scythia. According to its inhabitants, Herodotus writes, "one must see neither in front nor backwards" beyond the distant northern regions. Pomponius Mela mentions that, at the approaches to the Rhipaean mountains, the "eternally falling snows make these places so unapproachable that one cannot even see farther, howevermuch one might strain one's vision". These regions, covered by the icy breath of Boreas, are "severe" and "desolate" (Herodotus, Mela, Pliny etc.), and are enveloped by "thick darkness"-"real desert". "These", writes Solinus, "are submerged in eternal darkness; everything there is in the control of griffins, wicked... and bordering on lunacy ..., who tear to pieces all whom they see ...". One of the "fathers" of Christian church, Ieronim (A.D. 348-420), recapitulated the stories of golden mountains in the north, which are inaccessible to man "because of griffins, dragons and monsters with massive bodies."

This, of course, is a later testimony. But, already in the 7th to 4th centuries B.C., when the Hellenes received fresh reports from Scythians, the Greek authors wrote that far beyond the land of the Scythians, in the northern mountains, there "lived" predatory, zealous gold-guarding griffins, one-eyed heroes, Arimaspians, goat-footed men, cannibals and monstrous, ferocious maids. These latter were identified by Greek poets with the personages of the Hellenistic myths, Graiai and Gorgons—"Phorkides", the daughters of Titan Phorkys—also reputed for being cannibals and blood-suckers. Aeschylus placed them alongside griffins and Arimaspians, while portraying, through the words of Prometheus, the dangers on the route to ill-fated Io, persecuted by the great goddess, Hera, the wife of Zeus :

> Crossing the sea's loud surges, until next
> Cisthene's Gorgoneian plain thou reach,
> Where dwell the Phorkides, three hoary maids,
> Swan-visaged, of one common eye possessed,
> And single-toothed; whom never does the sun
> Nor nightly moon look down on with its rays.

And near at hand their three winged sisters dwell,
The snake-tressed Gorgons, hateful to mankind :
Whom never mortal looks upon and lives.
Such then the caution which I give thee. Now
Hear of another grewsome sight; for ware
the griffins, Zeus's sharp-beaked silent hounds,
And the one-eyed host, the horsemen Arimaspi
Who dwell around the river running gold,
The stream of Pluto. Go not near to these.

All these fabulous beings "dwelt" at the northern mountains, before the land of the "blessed"—of the "Hyperboreans". The poet Pindarus also places the Gorgons here.

Thus, again, the Scythian "motifs" have been found to resemble the Indian accounts of far-off northern regions. The legends about the northern mountains are preserved not only in the *Mahābhārata* but also in many other works of ancient Indian literature. These formed, for instance, the basis of one of the eloquent stories in the second great epic of India, namely the *Rāmāyana* (chronologically, somewhat later than the *Mahābhārata)*. After long, futile attempts to find his wife, Sītā, who had been abducted by Rāvana, Rāma sought help from his ally, Sugrīva. Sugrīva sent an army of monkeys to all quarters of the world in search of Sītā; and while doing so, he apprised the leader of the troops sent to the north, of the hazards that would have to be surmounted *en route*. It would be necessary to reach and cross the Himalayas, move northwards, pass through the deserts, surmount other massive mountains. Still further to the north of these areas, according to the words of Sugrīva, there would be the domain of gloom and terrifying darkness, with death awaiting anyone who would venture to come close. But further, as mentioned by Sugrīva, there would also be the happy abode of the celestial *devas* and holy *munis*, with fruits and golden flowers growing everywhere, rivers flowing in golden beds, and then the eternal ocean and the golden mountains, with their peaks reaching the sky.

SOME RESULTS AND NEW PROBLEMS

Thus, the Indian legends about regions in the extreme north agree, detail by detail, motif by motif, with the ancient Greek

and Roman tradition about the far-off regions beyond Scythia. Of course, it can be admitted that some images and themes must have appeared independently of each other; various peoples of the world in the past did, indeed, have their own notions about the far-off regions of eternal happiness, about the coveted paradise whither the souls of the dead strove to go, about the loftiest inaccessible mountains, the abode of the gods, about the dreadful supernatural beings, preventing the heroes from attaining their desired aim. Such typological similarities could be still closer; the mythological systems of ancient times were, in much, developed in accordance with the common laws peculiar to human thinking at specific stages of social consciousness.

But in the present case there concur not the individual themes but whole cycles of notions. Like motifs are arranged in like sequences and like immediate relationships to each other.

A specific place is also here occupied by the high mountains and dreadful miracles and happy paradisal abode, But these are not simply lofty but great mountains in the north with descriptions (for instance, the "astronomical" role of these mountains) characteristic of both the traditions. The region in the approaches to the land of the "blessed" is impregnable and engulfed in darkness. The whole panorama directed towards the north, extends from real geographical regions to far-off northern regions. It ends, both in the Indian and the ancient Greek and Roman tradition, at the Northern ocean and as such specific feature as "polar" phenomena.

Scholars have paid attention to some of these concrete parallels,—for instance, the northern mountains, the Meru of the Indians and the Rhipaen of the Greeks. These parallels are often explained like this : the idea of the great northern mountains, over which the luminaries move, was formulated among the Greeks in the 7th century B.C., under the influence of geographical and astronomical views of the Egyptians. Initially, the Hellenes linked the Rhipaean mountains with the mountain ranges of the neighbouring Thracia and, later, upon considerable growth of their geographical knowledge, with the far-off mountains, beyond Scythia, in the north of Europe. Only much later, during the period when Greek and Roman astronomy and geography exercised considerable influence ni

the countries of the East, the notions of the northern mountains appeared in Iran and India. Else, as the well-known German scholar, Kissling wrote, one would have to regard as a miracle the circumstance that the Indians endowed Meru with the same features and same astronomical significance as the Greeks did the Rhipaeans.

But the Indian tradition about Meru cannot be the result of the influences from the west during the Roman or even the Hellenistic period; it is far more ancient, and had been in existence in India long before the achievements of the ancient civilization began to have a perceptible influence on the Indian culture. When, after the campaigns of Alexander the Macedonian, the Greeks came in direct contact with the Indians, they learnt also of the local legends about Meru. Megasthenes, the ambassador of Seleucus I, in his account of India (end of 4th century B.C.), has mentioned the name of this mountain ("Meros") and some details clearly going back to the Indian circle of notions about Meru. He has, for instance, mentioned that, on it, above the snows, there are sources of pure waters, fruit trees, giving abundant fruit, numerous animals and birds, and that these are a place of joy and the abode of gods. These Indian gods were called by the ancient Greek and Roman authors as Zeus (obviously, the creator-god, Brahma, "living" at the Meru) and Dionysus-Bacchus (another god "living" on the Meru - the dancing god, Siva).

A still earlier tradition about the sacred mountains reaching up to the sky is found fixed in the written monuments of Iran. Unfortunately, the data on the mythology of the Aryas of Iran are scanty and fragmentary. These are contained primarily in the religious-philosophical works of Zoroastrism—the main religion of ancient Iran. At one time, the collection of these sacred texts, the monument of ancient Iranian literature, were diverse and voluminous; but with the spread of Islam, Zoroastrism fell into decline, and the local pre-Islamic, literature was virtually lost. Only some Zoroastrian works have been preserved to this day by the Parsis—the followers of Zoroastism, whose few communities even now preach this ancient religion.

Thus, modern scholarship has, at its disposal, the most ancient monument of the Zoroastrian religion—the *Avesta* (though far from being complete). Compared with the vast written heritage of ancient India, the extant Zoroastrian literature is extremely scanty, but, nevertheless, of cardinal importance for the study of various problems of the culture of the Indo-Iranian peoples at the dawn of their history. Many data from this work serve as a link of its own kind between the traditions of the Aryas of India and of the ancient Iranian speaking tribes of the Black Sea region.

For the purposes of our present study it is very important that there are, in the Zoroastaian literature, references to the sacred mountains of Hera Berezaiti ("High Hara"). Such information is contained already in very old portions of the *Avesta*, chronologically much earlier than the epic collections of India.

SUMMITS OF THE HIGH HARA

Hara extends to the sky itself; sun, moon and stars revolve round its summit. "Rise, rise, 0 fast-steaded sun, over the High Hara, gift your light to the earthly world ... rise, rise, 0 moon, over the High Hara, gift your light to the earthly world ... rise, rise, 0 mysterious stars, gift your light to the earthly world ...".

Such is the notion of the Hara (or "Haraiti") mountains and their main summit, Hukairya, which is reflected in the Avestan hymn to Rasnu-one of the gods of the Zoroastrian pantheon: "When you, 0 righteous Rasnu, arrive on the shining High Hara ...on the splendid golden mountain of Hukairya, from which fall the mighty unchecked waters of the Ardvi...on the greatest summit of the Haraiti mountians, where the stars, the moon and the sun revolve..." Found preserved in the Zoroastrain tradition is the account of how, at the creation of the world, there emerged and rose the High Hara. It grew in the course of 800 years—in the first 200 years it reached the stars in the next 300 the moon, and then in another 200 years it rose to the sun and, ultimately, to the endless world.

According to the *Avesta* the High Hara was created by Ahura Mazda himself, the greatest god, the creator to the Universe. Around Hara he fixed the path of the luminaries, the high steaded sun, moon and stars. In the Indian tradition, Brahmā, the creator-god himself laid down the path of the motion of the luminaries over the Meru. As Sūrya (Sun) never leaves the Maru ("going round these mountains from all sides", revolving along this path"), so also does the Sun always go round the High Hara in its journey "along the path laid down by Ahura Mazda". Ahura Mazda and hosts of his supreme angels on the summit of the Hara built a palace for the great god, Mitra. From here, he surveys the whole earth and rises over the world before the sun. "Mitra, having wide pastures, is the first of the gods to rise over the Hara before the immortal high-steaded sun; he is the first to pervade the fine gold-like mountain peaks".

And for another god, the "fine triumphant Sraosha"—is raised the splendid thousand-column house "at the highest peak, on the Haraiti mountains." Many gods live on Hara—the mighty unchecked Ardvi, the goddess of fertility, the centre of all the waters of the world, represented in the form of a mighty stream falling from the gigantic heights of the golden peak of Hukarya; Haoma, the god of the sacred drink of immortality (corresponding to the Indian soma). Ahura Mazda made Haoma the priest of the gods, fixed the place for his prayers and sacrifices "at the highest altitude of the Haraiti mountains". Audible everywhere is the loud voice of the god, Haoma, heard from the summit of the mountain over the whole earth and permeating the sphere the celestial world.

Even the greatest mythical heroes made sacrifices on the High Hara: the first king of the earth, the ruler of all countries, peoples and demons—Haosh'yanka Paradata; and another great ruler-the sunlike brilliant Iima, the son of Vivahvanta. Apparently, he alone was given the right of staying on Hara and worshipping the gods there. All other heroes mentioned in the *Avesta*, even the most celebrated, could send their sacrifices to the gods only in other regions of the earth.

The summits of the Hara Berezaiti are, like the shining peaks of the Meru and the Rhipaens, covered with gold. The

Zoroastrian tradition mentions also about the lakes, rivers and streams, flowing in golden beds at the High Hara. The Zoras-trian "Book of Creation" (*Bundakhishn*) mentions hundred thousand golden canals along which waters flow into the lake on the peak of the Hara. The mythical mountain, both in the case of the Iranians and the Indians, was considered linked to the celestial stream and the World ocean. The rivers of the earth have their source in the Hara, as also in the Meru (and in the Rhipaean mountains).

In the cosmology of the ancient Iran it was affirmed that, at the creation of the world, the first to be created was the Hara Berezaiti. All other mountains of various parts of the world grew out of it and were connected, through underground roots, with the first-created High Hara. "The first mountain to rise on the earth", the *Avesta* states, "is the High Hara." The Indians also had a similar notion, the Meru ranges were supposed to exist at the creation of the world, and their roots extended deep into the earth and connected Meru with other mountains of the world, and the "best" of the mountain peaks of, Meru, Mt. Mandara, had its "roots going into the earth as far as 11,000 yojanas."

The range of the Hara and the Meru, according to the notions of the Iranians and the Indians stretched on the whole earth from the west to the east (the same is said of the great mountains to the north of Scythia). And, besides, these massive mountains were located in the north. Thus, the data of the ancient Iranian tradition about the Hara mountains find direct parallels in the Indian cosmological cycle about Meru.

YUDHISTHIRA AND KAI-KHUSRU IN THE GREAT MOUNTAINS

The Indian and Iranian notions of sacred northern moun-tains are of great antiquity. These are found in the early texts of the *Avesta* and in the Vedic literature. Methods of compa-rative study of history enable us to assume that such notions were prevalent amongst the Indo-Iranian tribes already in the general Aryan period, and thus to fathom the bygone times even deeper.

Comparative study of Indian and Iranian epos opens new vistas before the scholars. The epic tradition of the ancient Iranians was no less vast and significant than the Indian, though the original collections of the epos of ancient Iran, unfortunately, are almost no longer extant. Copious literature has, however, survived in translations. After the spread of Islam in Iran and Central Asia, many epic works were translated into Arabic and modern Persian languages. Whole cycles of epic accounts and legends about ancient Iranian kings and heroes are available in the Persian - Tajik literature. Some of the rather more popular themes formed the basis of individual works of early medieval poets and writers. Particular use was made of the translation of the ancient *Khudai-namak* [the Book of Rulers], an epic work written before the Arab conquest. A special place is occupied by the *Shah-Nama*, of Firdausi (A.D. 934 or 941-1020), a classic of Persian and Tajik literature. This work virtually is a monumental code of the epic history of Iran, and gives a detailed exposition of ancient Iranian epic accounts.

The Indian *Mahābhārata* and the Iran'an *Shah-Nama*, differ in very many ways, in their character, method of exposition, world outlook reflected in both the epics. These were written in different countries, in different historical and cultural environments. The *Mahābhārata* begins with the exposition of the history of the Pāṇḍava and the Kauravas from the time the implacable enmity between these kindred families began. Numerous "ramblings", into the more ancient history of the Indians, touching stories of love, legends of gods and of the creation of the world, religious-philosophical sections, all these are vast digressions from the main theme.

The narrative of the *Shah-Nama* has a different "chronological" sequence. It begins from the time of the reign, on earth, of the very first king, and goes on to dwell upon the life of many rulers and heroes, their exploits and tragic destiny. From legendary motifs Firdausi passes over to the description of historical personages and political events of the time of Sasanids (3rd-7th centuries A.D.). The central place in the epic cycle proper is occupied by the account of long struggle between the rulers of Iran and the neighbouring Turan (according to tradition, they were blood relations, the descendants of the epic

hero, Faridun).

Scholars have already been noticing the identity between a number of significant details in the themes of the *Mahābhārata* and the *Shah-Nama*. This identity is found in the destiny of the chief personages and in the characteristic events taking place in identical sequence. This shows that the main nuclei of the Indian and Iranian epics have the same thematic basis. This has led some scholars (for instance, the French scholar of Iranian studies, James Darmesteter) to conclude that the authors of the *Mahābhārata* had borrowed the theme from the Iranian epos. But such a point of view is contradictory to all data on the development of the epic tradition of India. The Swedish scholar, S. Wikander, has shown that the common features in the themes of the *Mahābhārata* and the *Shah-Nama* owe their origin to the same Indo-Iranian heritage. Of particular interest here are the episodes of the fate of the main heroes of both the epics—king Yudhisthira, the eldest of the pandava brothers, and Kai-Khusru, the Iranian king.

The bloody battle between the Pāṇḍavas and Kauravas ended in the victory of the Pāṇḍavas, but this resulted in the extirmination of whole tribes, death of many heroes. Everything around became desolate, the mighty Gaṅgā (the Ganges) flowed by quietly, but the "sight of those great waters was dismal, and brought no joy". This gave rise to pensive misgivings, to profound despair on the results of aimless enmity, "Tormented by the anguish", King Yudhisthira grieves over the dead. He resolves to abdicate the throne, gives the throne to another ruler, and "begins to think of taking to wandering along with his brothers". He stripped off from his body all crest-gem and belt and ornaments, and donned himself in a rough dress. Bhima, Arjuna, Nakula Sahadeva, the peerless Draupadi, all of them also did the same and set forth wandering. The path of the wanderers lay towards the north... .

The battle between the "Iranians" and the "Turanians", lasted for a long time; many glorious heroes perished. The Iranians got the upper hand, but the victory brought no joy to Kai-Khusru.

And he began to ponder

Over what had happened, what he had attained,
I hold sway over
'... all hill and desert, sea and the dry land,
But my heart from horror have I not restrained'.
Sobbing, he went within the garden's round
And threw all kingly signs, in full view of all.

Kai-Khusru set off on a long journey to the foothills of the high mountains. His warriors, chieftains, men and women followed him for a long time. But ultimately, Kai-Khusru asked them to return :

'Kingless ye from this hill must now return
The road ahead is long, waterless, and void of ease,
There is no grass there and no leafy trees.'

The ruler of the Iranians was left only with five of his companions. These were the celebrated heroes, Fariburz, Giv, Bezan, Gustaham & Tus, who "went with him unceasingly for one whole day and night". In a mountainous area they viewed a spring...and spent the night there...,but "when they woke up at dawn, they did not see the king". For long did they seek their monarch ; but

'Upon the hill a raging wind blew,
Of trees each branch and leaf that laid low,
From the black clouds blew an icy wind,
And towards Iran the way...
Up from the hill the sun his head thus brought,
The nobles' eyes in vain their monarch sought'.

...Awful difficulties and privations also fell to the lot of Yudhisthira and his five companions. Moving towards the north, they passed by mountain ranges, and lastly, saw before them "the best of the mountains, the great Meru". They set off for the mountain, but soon Draupadī found her strength failing. Yudhisthira, the best of the Bharata's line, did not even turn his eyes to look at her, and silently continued his journey. Then, courageous heroes, wise and righteous, celebrated for their feats and prowess, fell to the ground one after the other. At last, even the "tiger-man", the mighty Bhima, also collapsed.

Left alone, Yudhisthira "went like one stunned and grief-stricken". And here he came face to face with Indra, who took him (Yudhisthira) to the mountain abode, to the kingdom of bliss, where the "gods, gandharvas, Adityas, apsarās... stand in wait in shining clothes", where live the 'war-like people, heroes, shorn of all passion'. Such is the narrative of the last books of the *Mahābhārata*,— viz., of the "Great Journey" and the "Entry into Heaven".

Thus, in both the epics, the concluding episodes of the story of the great war agree almost completely in their theme. This makes us add what the extant version of the Iranian epic keeps mum upon : Kai-Khusru, having disappeared at the foothills of the far-off mountains, at a place where snow-storms threaten death, by some miracle, "ascended" alive to the summits of the mountain—to the abode of "bliss".

All the aforementioned parallelisms in the main line of the theme of the Indian and Iranian stories show that both the epic traditions basically go back to the common Aryan period. Already, during the period of the Indo-Iranian unity, the bards of the Aryan epos "knew" about the great mountains, inaccessible to the mortals. Celebrated and mighty heroes perished at their foothills. Only some of them, as seen from the story of the fate of Yudhisthira, were able to reach the forbidden "path"—and that, too, not by the ordinary course but with divine help. There, according to the Indian epos, the land of the gods and eternal happiness was revealed to them.

"BLESSED ABODE" IN IRANIAN MYTHOLOGY

"In the effulgent High Hara mountains there is neither night nor darkness, neither cold wind nor hot, nor fatal diseases, nor the nastiness caused by the demons, and no mist rises from the High Hara";—this is what is stated in the Avestan hymns to gods Mithra and Rashnu, and this is how the Iranian tradition portrays the great mountains.

In this legendary abode where there are palaces of the gods and where celestial beings and the greatest of heroes reside, wonderful birds live and sacred plants grow at heavenly heights. As in the land of happiness at Meru, here also there are no

diseases, no cold and hot winds, no mists. Like the Meru, the High Hara also is eternally shining. According to the conceptions of the Indian epos, there is a great ocean at Meru. (This is also mentioned in the accounts of the Rhipaean mountains). Similar information has also been preserved by the Avestan tradition : at the foothills of the High Hara there is a huge watery expanse—a "sea" (zraia) named Vourukasha, that is, "having wide bays". It is larger than all the waters of the world, "more forceful, with fine contours, deep, with waters stretching far", its shores rise in waves, and Vourukasha foams with waters of the mighty Ardvi falling into it with force from the great golden peaks of the Hara. In the "sea" there is an island where sacred animals live and remarkable plants grow (same as on the peaks of the Hara).

It is not known from the fragmentary data of the ancient Iranian religious tradition whether holy men were there or not on this island (the Indian epos referred to divine dwellers of the White Islands in the Northern ocean). But the notion of the paradisal abode was definitely linked with the Hara in the same way as it was with the Meru. Entrance to this abode lay through the foothills of the High Hara, and souls of real saints alone were able to reach this "abode of Award". Further destiny of these souls was determined by Mithra, Sraosha and Rashnu, the gods inhabiting the High Hara.

As on the Meru, the prosperous land of the celestial inhabitants was located also on the Hara. Most distinguished heroes alone could go there alive. But this is not all where the Indo-Aryan conceptions of the land of the "blessed" coincide. Both in the Iranian and the Indian traditions, legends have been preserved of specially blessed people. Ancient Iranians knew legends about the origins of these people and of the land which they inhabited.

This was long ago, at the dawn of the legendary history of mankind, when the entire earth was ruled by the righteous rulers of Paradata dynasty of early kings. To these also belonged the "brilliant" Yima, the son of a sun-like hero. When Yima performed sacrifices on the golden Hukairya, he sought from gods not only the highest power over all lands, peoples and demons, but also a happy life for the people. This

"blessed" life is described in very much the same way as on the summits of the sacred mountains. Yima prayed that his kingdom there should be free from "cold and heat", from "hot and cold wind", from "cold and thirst" so that food did not drys up, plants and people did not die, and that there should be no old age or death so that the father and the son always went like 15-year-olds, and that there were no jealousies "created by the demons."

The brilliant Yima ruled the earth for a thousand year. Not long before his death, on the command and with the help of Ahura Mazda, the creator-god, Yima built himself a beautiful abode, "guarded" from the rest of the world. It was located not far from the High Hara and from the "sea" Vourukasha. "People live a beautiful life there; there are many dogs, birds and red blazing fires. Pure waters flow, and golden meadows blossom there. There,...are men and women, the very best and the most beautiful,...the biggest and the most beautiful animals, the tallest and the most fragrant plants...". The residents of this abode of "bliss" do not suffer either from physical deformities or madness or leprosy or from any other diseases which Angra-Mainyu, the chief of the evil gods, sends to the people. A special span of life is fixed for the inhabitants of the happy land. "And these people live the most beautiful life"—thus ends the description of the blessed abode in the second chapter of the *Vendidad* (the only book preserved in full of the old *Avesta*).

The information as given in the extant Avestan texts about the concrete "geography" of the lands at High Hara is extremely scanty. Ancient Iranians believed that these mountains were located in the north and that these stretched on the whole earth from east to west. Besides, the High Hara and sea Vourukasha were "placed" far from the areas actually known to the authors of the Avestan hymns and even beyond the limits of all the seven portions of the world into which the inhabitable earth was, according to tradition, divided. It is remarkable that the Avestan texts mention the Great Bear rising over the Hara and the sea Vourukasha (so also do the seven rishis—Great Bear—rise over Meru).

Many rivers of the earth, including the great Raha—the semi-mythical river about whose location the composers of the hymns of the *Avesta* had no real idea—have their source in the High Hara. The *Avesta* has, however, communicated the tradition about the severe winters at the sources of this river.

Judging from Firdausi's poem, following the ancient tradition of the Iranian epos, the idea prevalent among the Iranians at one time was that the great northern mountains were inaccessible and that there was a barrier of snow on the approaches thereto. This is also stated in the more ancient reports of the *Avesta* : In precisely the very region where Yima created the abode of the blessed people, there is "severe ruinous wintery frost", and from the highest mountain Hara comes clouds of snow, bringing evil and ruin to people and all that is living. In the same region, as another text of the *Avesta* mentions, there reigns winter, there are ten winter months and only two summer months though even these are "cold for water, cold for earth and cold for plants." "This region is the heart of winter." But the same severe region has the sacred abode where there constantly flow fine waters, eternally bloom green meadows and where high plants give out sweet fragrance. And lastly, there is one more interesting evidence, a remarkable parallel with the Indian tradition : in the "blessed" abode people see "the setting and the rising" sun only once a year, and, for them, "one day is equivallent to one year". Here essentially is a direct parallel with the already mentioned reports of the Indian sources : *Manusmriti* (A year [human] is a day and a night of the gods; thus are the two divided, the northern passage of the sun is the day and the Southern the night); *Mahābhārata* (for the heroes, at the Meru, a day and a night were equal to a year); and still earlier *Taitirya-Brahmana* (one day of the gods is equal to a year [human]).

The same notions about the "polar" day and night are expressed in a somewhat different form in the accounts of ancient Greek and Roman authors about the land of the "blessed" beyond Scythia : beyond distant northern mountains there live "people, who sleep for six months" (Herodotus), "they sow in the mornings, reap in the mid-day, and gather the fruit of the trees in the evenings" (Pliny).

EPOS OF THE SCYTHIANS AND ANCIENT GREEK AND ROMAN LITERATURE

Thus, the conceptions prevalent both in ancient Iran and in ancient India of the great sky-embracing northern mountains, around which the luminaries revolve, were formed long before these could have been influenced by the ancient Greek and Roman traditions. Moreover, not merely the conceptions of these mountains but the whole cycle of related themes (unsurmountable obstacles *en route*, an ocean near them, "polar" phenomena, the land of the "blessed") definitely belong to the heritage of the common Aryan period, that is, go back to the same mythological, and, in the broader sense, cultural tradition which the ancestors of the Indians and the Iranians had at the time of their joint habitation.

Besides, such ideas known from the religious and epic works of India and Iran are analogous to the corresponding reports of the ancient Greek and Roman literature and must be regarded as genetically related to them. Here, it is quite natural to conclude that the information of the ancient [Greek and Roman] sources about the distant north beyond Scythia is based upon the Scythian tradition which, in its turn, belongs to the common Aryan cultural circle.

The conceptions of great mountains in the north of Europe are based on reports gathered from the Scythian world. These mountains are mentioned in the Greek literature from the 7th century B.C., but only by those authors who had, at their disposal, information from Scythia, including that about such peoples as Argippaeans and Issedonians (the northern mountains were placed further beyond them). Accounts of these peoples as given by the authors of the 7th-5th centuries B.C. are taken from various stories of the travellers and Scythian traders, which is also indicated by the various forms of names of the Issedonians (Essedonians; Isseds) and Argippaeans (Orgempians etc.).

The great mountains in the north are, in all versions of the Scythian stories and of accounts of ancient Greek and Roman authors, usually named Rhips, Rhipaeans. Herodotus alone does not mention this name; but even he, while referring to the

accounts of the Scythians and Argippaeans, states that, to the north of the latter, there are "high inaccessible mountains, which nobody traverses". Herodotus places these latitudinally. In this one can easily observe the traits, already well known, both of the Rhipaean and the mythical northern mountains of the epos of ancient Iran and India.

At the approaches to the northern mountains, the ancient Greek and Roman authors, writing about Scythia, placed the Arimaspians, griffins and other fabulous beings. Such information was, for certain, borrowed by the Hellenes from the Scythian world. Herodotus directly states that the Scythians themselves mention about one-eyed Arimaspians and gold-guarding griffins. The image of griffins has been immensely popular in Scythian art, though, in its iconography and stylistic interpretation, it reveals much that is common with the themes of the art of West Asia and Greece, where notions of such fabulous beings were prevalent even earlier than in the pre-Scythian period. The features of the mythical and real animals (eagle, lion) became one in the formation of the image of the griffin.

In the artistic objects of the Scythian world the griffins are usually endowed with the same features. The gold guarding griffins of the Scythian tradition are also usually described as such in the ancient Greek and Roman literature. Many writers after Aristeas portray griffins as "animals resembling lions but with wings and the beak of an eagle". Sometimes, a different description is also met with : Achylus, for instance, calls griffins "silent hounds". Scholars rightly assume that, in the Scythian epos, the image of the griffins was initially not linked to that of the lion.

The conceptions of one-eyed people and winged monsters are witnessed in the folklore of the peoples of North-eastern Europe and Siberia, which marks also another trend of the cultural relations of the Scythian world with the peoples of forest steppe and forest zone. Study of these contacts has yielded important data to show that many themes of the "northern cycle" of ancient Greek and Roman literature originated from the Scythian world. Thus, the image of the maids terrifying, bringing, death, living in darkness, who could

fly and who looked like swans, is known from the folkloristic tradition of a number of peoples of the North. In the Scythian epos, the swan-girls "lived" in the north, in the land of darkness.

According to the mythical views of the Greeks, the winged maids, the Phorkides, Graiai and Gorgons, dwelt in the land of the goddess of Night, far in the west, beyond the deserts of Northern Africa and pillars of Atlanta. There, according to ancient legends, Perseus chopped off the head of Medusa, a Gorgon. But in the work of Aeschylus, Phorkides and Gorgons are assigned a totally different locale, in the north or north-east, alongside griffins and Arimaspians. And if Pindarus be believed, Perseus killed a Gorgon in the land of the Hyperboreans, that is, in the distant north. According to the account of Pindarus, Perseus possibly was led to stay with the Hyperboreans themselves this theme was not there in the earlier variants of the legend about Perseus. The innovations were obviously due to the fact that, by the time of Pindarus and Aeschylus, such images of the Scythian epos had already come to be known to the Hellenistic world. Moreover, the Scythian themes had also influenced the description of the manner of the personages of the Greek myths proper. It is not mere coincidence that Aeschylus gives the horrible "old maids", the Phorkides, the epithet of "swan-visaged", an epithet that could be borrowed from the Scythian folklore for it is not witnessed in the Greek tradition about Phorkides.

Also significant are new features supplementing the original image of the Northern wind, Titan Boreas. The ancient reports about regions beyond Scythia mention Boreas, which blows from the Rhipaean mountains, bringing icy cold; the mighty wind captures the traveller with its violent breath, is capable of making him giddy and taking him off; the abode of Boreas is in a cave in the northern mountains. Such notions did not exist in the most ancient Greek legends. According to *Odyssey* all winds had their abode in the island of their sovereign, Aeol. Later, in the accounts of some ancient Greek and Roman writers a special cave serves as the abode of the Northern wind.

According to Pliny's reports, this cave lies close to the Arimaspians. The mythical image of the cold wind, living in

mountain caves, is widely prevalent among the inhabitants of northern regions from Finland to Siberia. Current among the peoples of the areas beyond the Urals was the belief about the old man, the Northern wind, blowing with tremendous force and covering the people with icy breath.

Such notions found their way to Greek literature and enriched the ancient Greek and Roman myth about the Titan Boreas. Individual details of "Scythian" origin were freely interwoven with the ancient themes of Hellenic mythology. Sophocles, in his tragedy *Antigonus*, gives the story of the unfortunate daughter of Boreas, who blinded her sons to take revenge upon her unfaithful husband.—"And she was from the oldest family... fostered, in the remote caves, by crowds of paternal storms, begotten by god, daughter of Boreas, faster than horses."

There are also many other examples testifying to the familiarity of the ancient Greek and Roman tradition with the themes of Scythian epos. On the whole, the influence of the Scythian culture on Hellenic world was very marked. Greek and Roman poets frequently took up Scythian motifs. They were attracted to the history, customs, manners, traditions of the Scythians, heroes of Scythian legends: "Ancestress" of the Scythians, the snakefooted goddess of earth, the epic king Kolaksai, the warrior-queen of the Scythian-Sarmation tribes etc.

The "northern cycle", in which we are presently interested is also fairly widely presented in the ancient Greek and Roman literature about Scythia. Its motifs often acquired a different interpretation in the ancient tradition, for these were understood under the influence of traditional Hellenic notions and were linked with well known images, though retaining the initial basis in many ways. If, for instance, the Arimaspians went in the ancient Greek and Roman literature under their Scythian name, other mythical beings were often mentioned under the names of personages with whom the Greeks identified them—Boreas, Phorkides and Gorgons. Same was the case with the "blessed" people of the Scythian tradition. In the works of ancient Greek and Roman authors they began to be called "Hyperboreans"; this is how the sacred people following the cult of Apollo were already earlier called in Hellenic mythology. It is

difficult to say where the Greeks placed these people at this time but already from the 7th century B.C. onwards there has existed a tradition that the Hyperboreans lived far to the north of Scythia, beyond the Rhipaean mountains.

Into the Greek notions about the Hyperboreans were instilled new features borrowed from the mythology and epos of the Scythians and their neighbours. Data of both the sources (Greek pre-Scythian, and those obtained from Scythia) were closely amalgamated with each other, and it is not always easy to ascertain the origin of some details or the other in the description of Hyperboreans. But there is no doubt that the "Scythian contribution" was very significant. Even in the odes of Pindarus, whose narrative about the Hyperboreans is perhaps, in the greatest measure, permeated by Hellenic colorith,various notions based on information from Scythia are clearly reflected.

In the ancient Greek and Roman world, the tradition about the Hyperboreans going back to Aristeas was regaded as most authoritative. It was assumed that precisely he possessed detailed and authentic data about these people. The given tradition according to which Hyperboreans lived to the north of the great mountains beyond Scythia, beyond the Argippaeans and Issedonians, along with Arimaspeans was based on stories current among the tribes the Scythian world and, in particular among the Issedonians.

Herodotus approached even these stories with great caution but he himself included, in his work, information from reports received by him in Scythia about a special people supposed to be living far in the north of the Agrippaeans, beyond high inaccessible mountains, though he also, at the same time observed : "I place no reliance in these". Of course, Herodotus had all the reasons to doubt the authenticity of such stories, but the very fact that the legends about the wonderful people beyond the distant northern mountains were current in Scythia cannot be questioned. Herodotus naturally could not hear the names of the Hyperboreans in Scythia because this name belonged to the Greek tradition proper and had only been given to the "blessed" people of the Scythian mythology.

In the themes of the ancient Greek and Roman tradition about the Hyperboreans one can identify some aspects which are

definitely linked with the notions then prevalent in the Scythian world. This first of all is the very localisation of Hyperboreans. Aristeas, Damastes and other Greek authors placed them between the northern mountains and the northern sea. Such a notion was initially alien to the Greeks and, undoubtedly, borrowed by them from the Scythian environment. In the works of ancient Greek and Roman authors Rhipaean mountains are placed under the constellation of the Big Bear, which is also connected with the land of the Hyperboreans. Thus, Latin poet Lucan (Ist century A.D.), in one of his poems, mentioned about the "icy carriage of the Hyperborean Bear".

Non-Greek features in the cycle about Hyperboreans are distinctly discerned in the accounts of the "polar" phenomena in their land. The scholars who assume that this information had already gone into the most ancient Greek tradition about the Hyperboreans beyond Scythia, are no doubt, right. The accounts of "polar" phenomena are an integral part of the general descriptions of the land of Hyperboreans in ancient Greek and Roman sources and are closely interwoven with such characteristic images and themes as feathery-icy land cave of Boreas, Arimaspians, Rhipaean mountains, and the Northern sea located beyond them. And, finally, the work of Herodotus reflects an independent tradition that in the land beyond high, inaccessible mountains, night continues for six months.

Thus, data about "polar" phenomena in distant trans-Scythian areas penetrated from the Scythian world into Greek literature, though in a legendary form.These, obviously, were based on concrete information which poured into the steppe regions of South-Eastern Europe from more northern regions. Thus, already in the 7th-5th centuries B.C., the Hellenes heard about the remarkable phenomena which were then being subjected to scientific interpretation by ancient scholars, thus receiving various elucidations.

The "Scythian source" can be regarded as the first stage in the history of ancient Greek and Roman notions about the distant north. To such reports were later added new, also based on concrete information but coming already not from the Scythian world but from the north-western regions of Europe. In the second half of the 4th century B.C. Pytheas, a native of

"Rhipaean" does perhaps have associations with certain Greek the Greek colony of Massalia (modern Marseilles) made a voyage to the land of tin (Britain) and from there to a place he called Thule. Modern scholars have identified it with one of the islands to the north of Scotland, with Iceland or part of Norway.

Pytheas left an account of his voyage, but of his work only insignificant fragments are now extant. The notes of Pytheas have been used by ancient Greek and Roman astronomers. The reports of Pytheas were often disbelieved by ancient authors. And only much later did it become clear to the European scholars that his data were fully authentic. Judging from the fragments that have come down to us, Pytheas had mentioned that in Tule "night was very short and, continued in some place for two, and in others, for three hours, so much so that, after a very short time, after sunset, the sun rose again". In the first century A.D., Pliny wrote about Thule : there, "in summer, there are no nights, but very little daylight in winter. Some think that this continues, without interval, for six months at a stretch". In this as well as in some other passages of the work of Pliny are joined together the testimony of Pytheas and a still earlier tradition about northern regions beyond Scythia.

Thus, in the course of many centuries, while describing the northern lands, the ancient Greek and Roman world turned to tradition going back to the 7th-5th centuries B.C. and based on reports received from the Scythian world of that time.

RHIPAEAN MOUNTAINS IN THE RIGVEDA ?

The name "Rhips", or Rhipaean mountains, is usually believed to be Greek even by those scholars who accept that the very notion of these mountains was received by the Greeks from Scythia. Already, in the ancient times, various explanations have been given for the Greek origin of this name. For instance, it is interpreted to have been derived from the Greek word "Rhipae" ("flight", "push", "gust" of wind). It is also compared with some toponymical names from Greece itself.

But such parallelisms do not at all serve to prove the Greek origin of this word, though, for some ancient authors, the name

words and notions. Thus, "Rhipae", meaning "gust" (of wind Boreas) has been associated with Boreas supposed to be inhabiting the Rhipaean mountains. But this, apparently, is only a secondary thought having nothing to do with the origin of the very name-"Rhipaean".

In the same way, the ancient name of Hyperboreans, originally never associated with the name of Boreas, has, later, been frequently understood to imply the "people, living above the a bode of Boreas." Other interpretations of this name, based on some notions or the other of these people, have also been prevalent.

The number of such examples could be considerably multiplied. Thus, numerous "explanations" have been given in ancient literature for the Greek origin of the name "Scythians". Greek interpretations have also been given to many other tribal names of the Scythian world. For instance, according to one of the explanations met with in ancient literature, the name of the tribe "Sakas" is linked to the Greek "sakos" (- "shield"). The Sakas indeed carried and used shields in war (the Greeks knew the Saka warriors well), but the ethnic name "Saka" is, of course, not of Greek but of Iranian origin and has nothing to do with the word "shield".

Exactly so, the fact that the Greeks had thought of the name "Rhipae", Rhipaean mountain does not by itself prove its Greek origin. The earliest mention of this name is found in the works of those ancient authors who were already familiar with the real information on Scythia and on the regions lying beyond Scythia and with the mythological conceptions prevalent there. Thus, already in the 7th century B.C., the themes of the Scythian epos proper were known to Alcman, who also knew of the existence of the Issedones. The *Arimaspea* mentions the Issedones, Arimaspians and griffins and the caves of the Northern wind at the Rhipaean mountains Hecateus, in his map, charted, in front of the Rhipaean mountains, not only the Issedones but also Arimaspians. Aeschylus and Sophocles also knew the Rhipaean mountains, and various images of Scythian folklore found reflection in their tragedies. Damastes had, at his disposal, information on Issedones and accounts of Arimaspians, the snow-covered Rhipaean mountain and the Northern sea.

The conception itself of the great northern mountains existed in the local Scythian tradition and, still much earlier, in the common Aryan tradition. There are grounds to believe that the notions of the great mountains had found reflection also in the oldest written monument of the Indians, *viz.* the *Ṛgveda*. Especially important in this behalf is a passage from one of the hymns to god Agni.

Agni, the god of fire, who makes sacrifices and oblations to the gods and "guards Soma", is celebrated in the hymn as one who dispels darkness. He is identified with the great gods, Mitra and Varuna, is called "Mitra of the flowing rivers and mountains". The passage further reads : "He [Agni] guards the coveted summit of *Ripa*, the Bird's seat. In his might, he guards the [daily] course of Surya. He [Agni] guards the Seven-headed at the centre [lit. : at the hub]. Sublime, he guards the Deities' enjoyment". This passage is one of the obscure, poorly understood texts of the *Ṛgveda*, and has been variously translated and interpreted. But the sense of the passage can be understood quite specifically when viewed in the context of the Indo-Iranian conceptions of the sacred mountains.

The word *ripa*, (or *rip*) occurring in the first line is usually interpreted by the investigators of the *Ṛgveda* to mean "earth". But, even with such an interpretation, the reference in the given passage must, obviously, be to a mountain, to the summit of a mountain ("the summit of the earth"). The text points out its following distinguishing features : it is the seat of Birds or, more precisely, of some special Bird; the course of the motion of sun-Surya lies there; there is the hub - the Centre of the World, where is the Seven-headed; there is the place of the enjoyment of the deities. Each of these details can be compared also with the data of the subsequent Indian tradition and of the *Avesta*.

First of all, the text pays attention to the course of the motion of the sun, which has direct analogies in the Indo-Iranian conception of the motion of the sun around the sacred mountains. According to the *Avesta*, sun revolves round the mountains constantly "along the path laid down by Ahura Mazda"; the Indian epos mentions that the sun, Surya never

leaves the mythical mountain, and constantly revolves along this path laid down at the time of the creation of the universe.

It can be assumed that the text here refers to the same "path of the Surya" laid down beforehand by the gods. In other words, the *Ṛgveda* obviously reflects a prototype of the conceptions of the *Mahābhārata* and subsequent Indian works.

The report of the hymn of the *Ṛgveda* about the place of the "enjoyment of the deities" apparently corresponds to the tradition of the happy abode of the gods located at Meru and Hara Berezaiti in later Indian and, independently thereof, in the Iranian Zoroastrian traditions. Ancient Indians and Iranians believed that these sacred mountains were the support of the earth, the base of the universe. The *Avesta* preserves the notion that, at the creation of the worlds the first to be created was the High Hara. Similar reports are contained in the *Mahābhārata* and the *Purāṇas* with regard to Meru. Both the Hindu and Buddhist works call Meru the "centre of the earth". The same "centre of the world" is obviously in view in the aforesaid text of the *Ṛgveda* where the mythical mountains (or, the "summit of the earth") have been called the "hub" [of the universe].

It is known that Meru was also regarded as the centre of the seven continents (or "islands"-*dvipa*) into which the whole existing world is said to be divided. Sometimes, the ranges of Meru are described as having seven peaks or "seven knots" of the large mountains. This tradition is reflected in many *Purāṇas* and has, later such conceptions are directly related to the report of the *Ṛgveda* - "in the centre (at the 'hub') god Agni guards the Seven-headed". However, it may be supposed that even in the present case the later reports of the Indian tradition go back to the ancient legends reflected in the hymns of the *Ṛgveda*.

And now we come to the last motif : birds dwell on the summit. The Indian and Iranian sources specially stress that birds dwell constantly on the summits of Meru and Hara Berezaiti. "The sacred mountain shone with flocks of wonderful birds", writes the *Mahābhārata* about Meru (on the Rhipaean mountains, too, according to the accounts of the ancient Greek

and Roman authors, there were unending swarms of birds). But the reference to birds on the sacred mountain is not simply a part of an eloquent description; this motif constitutes an integral part of the Indo-Iranian myth of the stealing, by birds, of the sacred plant of soma from the great mountains.

All the details of the aforementioned passage of the *Ṛgveda* are directly related to the "activity" of the god Agni. According to the epic tradition, Agni is one of the gods dwelling in the far-off northern region where Meru stands. This is seen also from the fact that the god Agni is here designated as "asura", a designation clearly archaic for the time of the *Mahābhārata*. This word "asura" to designate their great gods was used by the ancient Indians only during the period of the *Ṛgveda*.

In translating the word *ripa* as "earth", the modern scholars accept the interpretation of the later Indian commentators. But the real significance of the word *ripa* had obviously been lost by the time these commentaries were composed. This word itself had long been out of use, and is met with only in the *Ṛgveda*. The texts of this monument do not give any grounds for translating the word *ripa* as "earth". Like the Avestan "summit of Hara" and the Indian epical "summit of Meru", it is quite logical to translate this word not as "summit of the earth" but as "summit of Rhipa".

In so far as the conceptions of the ancient Iranians, Scythians and Indians about the great sacred mountains go back to the same common Aryan tradition, it can be assumed that the name "Rhips", or "Rhipaean mountains", as fixed in the ancient Greek and Roman literature is, in its origin, connected with the name *ripa* occuring in the text of the *Ṛgveda*.

The possibility that, in the *Ṛgveda*, this word could also have been employed as a common noun, to mean "mountain", "mountains", is, however, not ruled out. This was possible also in the Scythian world—then the name of the mountains in the Scythian epos ("Rhip", "Rhipaean mountains") went back to the original "rhip", "rhipa", meaning "mountain" in general. It is to be noted that the word "rap", in the meaning of "mountain", is encountered also in the language of the Khanty, one of the peoples of the Ugric branch of Finno-Ugric

linguistic family. In the languages of this group scholars have noticed numerous borrowings from the Indo-Iranian languages. The reverse influence has also been there. Such facts are the result of the centuries-old contacts of the Indo-Iranian tribes with the Finno-Ugric contacts which continued also during the Scythian period. The formation of the Ugric tribes took place roughly in the same areas which, during the Scythian period, were inhabited by tribes whom the Scythian tradition associated with the areas at the Rhipaean mountains and amongst whom, like the Scythians, the notions of these mountains were prevalent.

FLYING RISHIS

The circle of notions of the great mountains in the North is inseparably linked with the reports on "polar" phenomena. The "Arctic" theme, therefore, had to be a part of the general northern cycle known to the Aryan tribes already during the common Aryan period.

The conclusion also answers the question which was posed in the very beginning of this work: Are not the "Arctic" details of ancient Indian literature the result of fantasy? One can now say with confidence : no; these are not. But whence did the ancestors of the Indians then derive their knowledge of distant "polar" regions ? Can it be that Tilak's theory of the Arctic home of the ancestors of the Aryan peoples is indeed correct ?

The Scythians had a clear idea that the "polar" regions were located far to the north of Scythia and of the territories of their closest neighbours. Similar notions of distant northern regions also existed in the epos of ancient India and Iran; — the authors of these legends placed the northern regions far beyond the boundaries of their own lands, and considered these inaccessible. The establishment of a common Aryan origin of the "polar" cycle permits us to regard even this important detail (remoteness and inaccessibility of northern regions) as a component part of the oldest common Aryan notion of northern lands. In order to know about polar

regions and Arctic phenomena, other Aryan tribes, like the Scythians, did not necessarily have to live in these regions.

Thus, the very content of the "polar" epic cycle of the Scythians, ancient Indians and Iranians is already an evidence against the theory of the Arctic home of the ancient Aryas. The Arctic theory is also refuted by the materials of modern sciences Linguistics, Archaeology and History. Data of comparative linguistics enable us to judge how the ancestors of various Indo-European (including the Indo-Iranian) peoples lived at the time of their joint habitation. During that period, amongst the Indo-European tribes, there already existed society, highly developed in social and economic respects. They had long traditions of agriculture, employed wheel transport, used metals for making weapons and some of their implements of labour. Materials of archaeology show that the tribes which had attained such level of development could not, in any way, have lived in the areas beyond polar and adjoining regions, where the age of metal set in much later than even the time when the Indo-Iranian tribes reached West Asia and India.

But, nonetheless, how did the ancient Aryas receive concrete information on distant northern lands and Arctic phenomena? We shall first see how the epic legends of the the Indo-Iranians themselves depict the "contacts" with the North. Preserved are many legends describing the path to mythical northern lands which, both to ancient Indians and ancient Iranians, seemed inaccessible. If someone did manage to reach there, he, as stated by the legends, did so in a special, miraculous way. These "lucky people" usually were not kings or warriors but holy men, priests mastering magic sacraments, celebrated ministers of religion or highly revered sages. Such "journeys" are frequently mentioned in the *Mahabharata*.

The hermit-sage, Galava, decided to set out for the remote lands; and on learning his intentions, the sacred bird Garuḍa appeared before him : Come, we will go together: I will bear thee comfortably ... to the farthest extremity of the earth; Come, O Galava, Do not tarry ;

And Galava mounted the sacred bird; he flew, delighted with everything he saw from the heavenly heights :

The honoured sage, Bhīṣma, narrated many old legends to king Yudhīṣthira. One of these is about how *rishi* Nārada travelled to the White island, where in the middle of the Northern ocean lived "blessed" people devoted to God. The great god, Nārāyana-Viṣṇu, gifted special power to Nārada for his devotion. Appearing before Narada, he said : "Go, Nārada, do not linger...". Having received the coveted boon, Nārada hurried on, much more powerful. And he ascended, then alighted to the vast Milky sea, the receptacle of amṛta, made worship to the lord of the gods and again set off for his abode.

And here is another legend narrated by Bhīṣma. Śuka, wise and learned in yoga, son of the legendary sage, Vyāsa, desired to reach the eternal abode where there there are no sufferings, and the luck is great :

> He rose in the air ...ascended to the sky. Going to the sky, the sacred one moved, like wind, with confidence. All beings saw the Excellent Brahmana, with grandeur like that of the son of Vinata (i.e rising with the speed of wind or thought)... . Looking at his quick flight, the rows of apsarās filled the space from everywhere with echoes of rejoicing.

In the northern quarter appeared Mount Meru shining with gold. When Śuka came close to it, Bhīṣma further states, the summits of the mountains were divided into two so as not to obstruct the path of the celestial wanderer, and seeing "Śuka flying, like vapour, between the bifurcated mountains ..." the inhabitants of the heaven greeted him. Śuka set off on a long journey, went to the earth on foot, capable of being carried on the air. He surmounted mighty rivers and lakes, passed through the mountains, reached even Meru, saw various lands, and that great muni came to the land ... of Āryavarta. He completed his journey, ... wandering in the sky like a bird.

"As you requested", said Bhīṣma to king Yudhīṣthira, "I have narrated to you in detail. This true legend was some time narrated to me word by word by the divine *rishi*,

Nārada, and also, O rājā, by the great Yogi, Vyāsa, in his talks."

ARISTEAS' FLIGHT

Unfortunately, the Scythian epos proper has not come down to us; and our knowledge of Scythian spiritual culture is based largely on stray accounts of the ancient Greek and Roman authors. But even these "alien" accounts contain an exceptionally interesting episode about the "flight", to the land lying beyond the great northern mountains, of Aristeas, the Greek author of the epic poem, *Arimaspea*.

Modern scholars have, at their disposal, only individual fragments of this poem of Aristeas; but this has been widely cited by various ancient Greek and Roman writers, beginning from the 6th-5th centuries B.C., a fact that enables us to have some idea of the general features of its contents. It dwelt on the travels of its author in the areas of the Scythian world right to the land of the Issedonians, and his return journey. It contained descriptions of the customs of variuas peoples, of their manners and everyday life, individual motifs of epic traditions of the Scythians and their neighbours, narratives about various fabulous beings supposed to be dwelling beyond the land of the Issedonians, far in the North.

Tradition has preserved quite real information on Aristeas. He was born in the family of a famous citizen of the Greek colony of Proconnesus on an island in Propontis (sea of Marmara), and had been initiated into the sacraments of the cult of Apollo. Apollo, the god of heavenly light, Phoebus, was considered one of the chief deities both in Greece itself and in the Greek colonies from Southern Italy to North-Eastern Black Sea region. The shrines of Apollo on the islands of Delos and Delphi enjoyed particular respect in the whole Hellenistic world. The famous Delphi priestess, Pythia had acquired wide fame. In an ecstatic state, inhaling stupefying fumes and taking drugs of bay leaves, she used to prophesy the future. The legend about the Hyperboreans and the gifts which they are believed to have sent to the main sanctuaries of this god, is associated with the cult of Apollo.

The notion that the land of the Hyperboreans was situated

far in the north of Scythia had made its appearance in the Greek world already before the time of Aristeas. It may be assumed that the legends about the Hyperboreans dwelling beyond the Scythians were known even in his home town lying on the sea route from Greece to North Black Sea region. Probably, these legends precisely about these enigmatic people attracted Aristeas to undertake the difficult journey to northern lands. As stated by Herodotus, this Aristeas, "being then possessed by Phoebus", set off for Scythia, and then reached as far as the Issedonians. The ancient tradition has preserved a reference that Aristeas possibly also reached the land of the Hyperboreans which was considered inaccessible.

Many are the strange and wonderful stories told in the ancient world about Aristeas. Some of these are also given by Herodotus : Once Aristeas entered a fulling mill and died there. The owner of the mill, seeing the lifeless body of of Aristeas, informed his relatives of his death, but when they came to bury Aristeas with honours, they "did not find there Aristeas, either dead or alive". Here, Herodotus refers to the testimony of one of the citizens of Cyzicus (the city and island by the side of Proconnesus) who said that he had seen Aristeas and talked to him at the time when he, in Proconnesus, was believed to be dead.

Much later tradition has preserved the information that Aristeas, at his own will, could supposedly separate his soul from his body and then call it back. Pliny knew many accounts of how the soul of Aristeas used to "fly away", through his mouth, in the form of a crow. A similar legend was already known to Herodotus: Aristeas came to Metapontum (a Greek colony in the south of Italy) and "commanded that an altar be raised in honour of Apollo, and a statue with his name be put by its side". Herodotus also refers to the report of the citizens of Metapontum as to how, earlier, Aristeas, following Apollo, was believed to assume the form of a crow.

According to the report of the Greek grammarian of the 3rd century A.D., Athenaeus (following here a more ancient source), Aristeas possibly came to Metapontum from Hyperboreans. And this is how the Stoic philosopher, Maksim Tirskii (2nd century A.D.), describes the "flight" of Aristeas to

Hyperboreans : "He (Aristeas) mentioned how his soul left his body and, evaporating to the sky cut across [various] Lands, both Greek and alien, all islands, rivers, mountains; how the limit of his journey was the land of the Hyperboreans, [and how] this way he gained abundant knowledge of all customs, of various landschafts and climates, of the tides of seas and overflowing of rivers... ."

The same Maksim Tirskii speaks of Aristeas : "This was a man from Proconnesus, whose body lay with hardly perceptible symptoms of life, in a deathlike state, at the time when his soul had gone out of his body and was wandering in the sky, like a bird, surveying everything below—earth, sea, rivers, cities, peoples ... then, the soul, re-entering the body made it alive, and it narrated about various things, which the soul had seen and heard."

These unusual legends about Aristeas were particularly current among the followers of the cult of Apollo, especially amongst the Pythagoreans who had incorporated these into the circle of their conceptions about the "wanderings" of the soul. Among the modern scholars there is no uniformity with regard to the treatment of the legends about Aristeas : Some believe that the *Arimaspea*, in addition to concrete notions about Scythia, also reflects the "wanderings" of the soul in a state of trance, notions borrowed from the shamanistic cults, which, in the opinion of these scholars, were prevalent in the Scythian world. There are others who suppose that Aristeas had actually travelled to Scythia and further on to Issedonians ; and that the accounts of the "wanderings" of his soul appeared much later, and were, in the Greek environment proper, then linked with the teaching of the Pythagoreans.

Both the viewpoints can, however, be coordinated. The data of the sources give no ground for doubting that the author of the *Arimaspea* had been to Scythia and had reached as far as the land of the Issedonians. Along with this, the "shamanistic" elements in the tradition about Aristeas definitely existed already before and independently of the influence on it of the Pythagorean school, which is clearly witnessed, for instance, from the accounts of Herodotus. To Herodotus were known legends not only about Aristeas but

also about some Abaris, a "Hyperborean". These legends are preserved in greater detail in the works of later ancient writers : "From the land of the Hyperboreans came the Scythian, Abaris...highly experienced in religious service...On an arrow presented to him by Hyperborean Apollo, he travelled through rivers, seas and impassable places, as if travelling on air... . At the time of his travels, as the rumour goes, he made purifications and drove off sea and air diseases ...made authentic prophesies about earthquakes...calmed stormy winds...and pacified the ragings of rivers and seas...". Of course, these legends about Aristeas show features of a subsequent Greek (particularly, Pythagorean) treatment of an ancient theme, influenced, however, by the religious conceptions of the Scythian world.

In any case, already, the oldest tradition itself about Aristeas, independently of the later redactions, enables us to set apart, in it, some "shamanistic" features : "wandering" of the soul, separated from body lying lifeless, "reincarnation" into a bird (crow), stories of remote lands and peoples supposed to be visited by the soul or seen by it at the time of its "flight", and all this in a state of special cultic excitation, possession.

It cannot, of course, be denied that, in the Greek religion, particularly in the cult of Apollo, there were some characteristics akin to the "shamanistic" circle, but the "shamanistic features" in ancient Greek and Roman accounts about Aristeas were not the reflection of religious and mythological views of the Greeks themselves. Like many other epic themes and mythological motifs borrowed by the Greeks from the Scythian world, the "shamanism of Aristeas" was directly related to the religious notions of the Scythians and their northern neighbours, especially if we take into account the data about the arrival of Aristeas in Scythia and in distant regions beyond Scythia—*viz.*, in the land of Issedonians. The "visit" of Aristeas to Hyperboreans, "living" beyond the inaccessible northern mountains, can be interpreted as a Shamanistic "flight", as hallucinatory images of a shaman, which he resorts to at the time of shamanizing (rituals performed by a shaman in a state of ecstasy).

Shamanism as a specific form of religion was more widely

prevalent specially amongst the peoples of Siberia, North Asia and of the north of Eastern Europe. The religions of ancient Indian and Iranian peoples (including the Scythians) are, on the whole, of a totally different type. It is true that, in the mythical and epic notions of the Scythians, there is much that is common with the mythological images of the peoples of the North. Moreover, some modern scholars (the German scholar K. Mueli, for instance), depending upon the data of ancient Greek and Roman literature on Scythia, find elements of northern shamanism in the religious practice of the Scythians themselves. K. Mueli specially stressed the similarity of "Scythian shamanism" with the religious views of the Finno-Ugric peoples of the Urals and Transurals.

On the basis of such materials testifying to the closeness of a number of religious notions of the steppe tribes and population of the more northern regions in the Scythian period, it would be possible to imagine that only in this period did the tribes of Scythia borrow the features of shamanism from their northern neighbours. But fully admissible is also another conclusion : "shamanistic rites" already existed in the religion of the ancestors of the Scythians and, since the elements of shamanism are discerned also in the most ancient religious works of India and Iran, their origin can also be traced back to the common Aryan period. This assumption is corroborated by the analysis of the data testifying to the relations of ancient Aryas with northern tribes of the forest zone, with the ancestors of the peoples of Finno-Ugric linguistic group.

ARYANS AND FINNO-UGRIANS

To this group of peoples now belong the Saams, Finns, Estonians, Karelians, Mordvins [Mordva], Maryans, Udmurts, Komis, Mansi [Voguls], Khanty [Ostyaks], Hungarians etc. Their ancestors lived in the forest regions of the North-Eastern Europe and Urals (known in the Russian chronicles under the names of 'Chud', "Ves", "Merya", "Muroma", "Yugra" etc.). Of the modern Finno-Ugric languages, Hungarian alone is situated far from the territories mentioned, but it was brought to Central Europe in the 9th century A.D. after the migration,

from the areas around the Urals and the Volga, of the tribes which, in the Russian chronicles, are called Ugras. Among the other Finno-Ugric languages, Hungarian is closest to the languages of the peoples of Transurals, the Khanty and the Mansi. Hungarian, Mansi and Khanty constitute the Ugric branch of the Finno-Ugric languages; the rest belong to the Finnic branch. The region where the Finno-Ugric tribes appeared, included, as believed by scholars, the forest regions around the Volga and the Kama up to the Urals; and the movement, to the West, of the western Finn Tribes (the ancestors of the Finns, Estonians, Karelians) dates to a later period.

In their origin, the Finno-Ugric languages are not related to the Aryan, which belong to a totally different linguistic family, the Indo-European. The numerous lexical similarities between the Finno-Ugric and the Indo-Iranian languages therefore, testify not to their genetic closeness but to deep multifarious and long contacts of the Finno-Ugric and Aryan tribes. These contacts began already in the pre-Aryan period and continued on to the general Aryan period, and then after the division of the Aryans into the "Indian" and the "Iranian" branches, contacts were established between the Finno-Ugrians and Iranian speaking tribes.

Words borrowed by the Finno-Ugric languages from the Indo-Iranian are diverse. These include numerals, terms of kinship and names of animals. Specially characteristic are the words and terms connected with economy, names of implements of labour, metals (for example, "gold" : Udmurt and Komi-"zarni", Khanty and Mansi—"sorni", Mordvin—"sirne", Iranian—"zaranya", modern Ossetic—"zerin"). Numerous similarities are observed in the field of agricultural terminology ("grain", "barley", etc). Words prevalent in various Finno-Ugric languages and designating cow, calf, goat, sheep, lamb, sheepskin, wool, thick felt, milk are borrowed from the Indo-Iranian languages.

Such similarities as a rule, show the influence of the economically better developed steppe tribes on the population of northern forest regions. Significant also are the examples of borrowing by the Finno-Ugric, from the Indo-Iranian languages, of terms connected with horse-br eeding ("foal", "saddle"). The

Finno-Ugrians were familiar with the domestic horse, obviously as a result of their connections with the population of the Steppe South. Long contacts with the Steppe horse-breeding tribes were reflected in the language, epos, religious notions of forest tribes, including the Ugric, who had inhabited the Taiga for many centuries.

For the data of the medieval sources it is known that, already at that time, the Ugrian tribes were widely spread also in the regions to the west of the Northern Urals. The formation, however, of these tribes, apparently occurred in a considerable measure, also in the more southern regions bordering on the Steppes. In the Ugric languages, including the Hungarian, there are horse-breeding terms of the same origin. Among these there are also such as go to the Iranian source. Judging from materials collected by ethnographers of the 19th and early 20th centuries, the religious beliefs and mythology of the Ugrians around the Urals reflected the survivals of the ancient cult of the horse. The epic songs of the Khanty tell of riding knights whose detachments raise huge clouds of dust. In the Mansi legends God is the master of the land and protector of the people. Mir-susne-hum is portrayed as a horsemen going round the world on his white winged horse. The main sacrificial animal was usually the deer, though horse sacrifice, especially of the white one, was regarded as the most honoured. The immolation of the horse as the most desired and valuable sacrifice was characteristic of ancient religious practice of the Aryan tribes. Special preference was given to white horses.

These are only some but extremely significant examples of the ancient links of the Finno-Ugrian and Aryan tribes. The echoes of these contacts are followed also in the traditions of ancient India and Iran, going back to considerably later period when the tribes and nationalities of these countries had already built great states of the ancient times, and the level of their spiritual culture, social structure and political relations was greatly different from that in the Aryan and the general Iranian period—viz. the period of possible connections of the ancestors of the Indian Aryas and Persian tribes of Iran with those of the modern Finno-Ugrian peoples.

KING OF A GREAT POWER AND THE GOD OF THE PEOPLES OF TAIGA

Dramatic and enigmatic were the circumstances which led to the accession to the throne of Darius I, the king of the empire of the Achaemenids built in the middle of the 6th century B. C. by the Persian tribes of the South-Western Iran. This mighty empire had under its sway many countries of the Near East from Egypt and shores of the Aegean Sea to Central Asia and the Indus valley. The founder of the empire, Cyrus the Great had died in 530 B. C. in a war against the Central Asian nomads. Upon his death, the elder of his two sons, Cambyses, succeded to the throne, while the younger, Bardiya, became the viceregent of a number of important provinces. Darius, in his Behistum inscription—as also ancient Greek and Roman writers describing the same events—mentions that Cambyses seeing in his brother Bardiya a dangerous rival, ordered him to be killed. This murder of the prince was known only to some persons very close to the king. Confident of the security of his throne, Cambyses set off on a campaign in Egypt, and spent about three years there. But the king's calculations turned out to be wrong. Agitations started in Iran, and a state revolt took place. In 522 B. C., on 11th March, a person claiming to be Bardiya captured the power. The sources mention that this new ruler bore a striking resemblance to the actual prince.

Hearing the news of the revolt, Cambyses hurried to Iran but died on the way, in Syria, in mysterious circumstances. According to some accounts, he died of an injury which he supposedly received accidentally while mounting his horse. Other data makes us assume that the king was assassinated. "Bardiya" was now accepted as the sovereign in the whole power. During the short seven months of his reign, he was able to carry out important social and religious reforms. But at this time, seven leading Achaemenid nobles, including also Darius, hatched plot against the self-styled king. On 29th September, 522 B. C., they broke into the king's residence, slaying him and his closest associates. Darius became the king. The reforms made by "false Bardia" were repealed.

Such is the version of the official Persian tradition and some ancient Greek and Roman authors. It is accepted also by many modern scholars. But can these accounts be fully relied upon? Is the official version not fabricated by Darius himself and his followers who did away with the king of their dislike? It is, for instance, difficult to believe that, for a number of years, the murder of Cyrus' son, the virtual heir-apparent, could be kept a secret, and that the self-styled king, before seizing full power, could remain unknown while fulfilling the role of the viceregent. Substantial, too, is the fact that in Aeschyles' *Persians*, the oldest of the extant Greek and Roman testimonies of these events, the king killed by the conspirators is not all regarded as an impostor. And perhaps the Achaemenian throne was actually ruled for seven months by the real Bardiya, the son of Cyrus, and not by any usurper assuming his name. (This point of view has been discussed in detail by the Soviet orientalist, M. A. Dandamaev).

The mysteries associated with the circumstances under which Darius occupied the throne do not end here. Why, for instance, did Darius alone of the seven conspirators become the king? Did he perhaps have special rights to the throne; and while hatching the plot it was presumed that, in case of success Darius alone would be the king? In his Behistun inscription Darius actually appropriates to himself the main role in throwing out the impostor, and portrays himself as the organizer of the conspiracy. But the ancient Greek and Roman sources give a different account of the events, assigning the main role in the conspiracy not to Darius but to other conspirators. Besides, Darius was not even a close relative or direct inheritor of Cyrus and Campyses. Not only he but also some other conspirators belonged to the Achaemenian family; and when, after the removal of "false Bardiya", the question of successions to the throne arose, both the father and even the grandfather of Darius were still alive.

Extant in the works of ancient Greek and Roman authors is a very interesting account as to how precisely did Darius receive the rights to the throne. After murdering the self-styled king, the conspirators started deciding as to who amongst them should be the king. None wanted to surrender his claim. Ultimately, all agreed to put an end to the controversy it was

decided that at dawn next morning all claimants were to go riding to a specified place (to the king's palace as is mentioned by Pompeius Trogus), and the one whose horse would neigh first at sunrise, would receive the supreme power.

Success came to Darius, and he became the king of the Achaemenian power. Darius himself calls his accession to the throne as the "kindness" of the supreme god. This is what Darius mentions in his inscriptions: Ahura Mazda The god of celestial firmanent, gave him the kingdom, made him the ruler and the law-giver, having entrusted to him vast land when it was torn by hostility and agitation, so that precisely he should restore order on earth and prosperity for the people.

...In the distant sky lives the highest god, Numi-Torum, the master of heaven. He is far from the earthly world, and does not usually meddle with the affairs of human beings. At one time the earth was swayed by discord, hostility and murder. The seven sons of Numi-Torum, sent to earth by the father, also took part in them. God resolved to put an end to the internescine wars, to restore order on the earth and establish there a single ruler. Accordingly, Numi-Torum himself descended from the sky and said to his sons: "He of you who, at dawn tomorrow morning, will be the first to come to my palace and tether his horse to the silver column, will be the elder of the people and of his brothers". The first to come was Mir-susne-hum, the youngest of the seven brothers, and, at sunrise, he tethered his horse to the silver column. Thus he became the ruler of the earth. Numi-Torum ordered his other brothers to honour Mir-susne-hum as the elder, and the people to regard him "as the chief leader and judge". He "commanded the young ruler to take care of his people". And the people started living in prosperity and richness under the care of Mir-susne-hum, "a person looking well after his people".

This legend current amongst the Mansi was recorded in the 19th century by the traveller and ethnographer, N.L. Gondatti. Here one naturally finds an analogy with the legend of the accession to the throne of the king of the Persians, viz. Darius I. Both the accounts reflect the tradition of hippomansi—the election of the king with the help of the horse. Both the legends also agree in a number of characteristic details : the decisive episode takes place at dawn next morning and is

connected with sunrise; in the Ugric legend the rival-brothers had to tether their horses to the silver column at the residence of the supreme ruler, the quarrel of the notable Persians was also resolved at the king's palace (the account of Herodotus, further, also mentions the tethering of the horse at the place of contest); the number of claimants to power also agrees in both the legends.

There is thus no doubt that both the legends are connected with each other. If the custom of electing the king with the help of the horse is well known from religious and epic tradition of ancient Indo-Iranians (it is also witnessed amongst some other Indo-European tribes), such conceptions and particularly detailed practice of election to kinghood could hardly have appeared independently amongst the ancestors of Mansi.

There are thus all grounds to assume that the Mansi version of the legend is, in its origin, connected with the conceptions of those Iranian speaking tribes who, at one time, lived in the neighbourhood of the ancestors of the Finno-Ugrians. And besides, the legend of Mir-susne-hum, the god of the peoples of Taiga, permits us to have a more precise information of some data of the Iranian tradition proper about the accession to throne of Achaemenian Darius I.

Irrespective of whether the election of Darius actually took place or not by means of hippomansi, or whether Darius himself, having no indisputable rights to the throne, took the "support" of the ancient custom, the very fact of the prevalence of such a tradition in ancient Iran even at the time of the great empire of the Achaemenids is in itself important.

MYSTERIOUS BEAST SHARABHA

Another interesting instance of the ancient relations of the ancestors of the Indo-Iranians with those of the Finno-Ugric tribes is provided by the Indian stories of the fantastic beast sharabha.

Sharabha has usually been described as a wild, powerful animal—stronger than a lion even. Ancient Indians called it *aṣṭapada* (eight-footed), and believed it to be an "inhabitant" of the snowy mountains. True, the notions of outward appea-

rance of sharabha have been varied and even conflicting. The most ancient Indians could not explain precisely what sort of beast this was. It was often compared with a camel and sometimes even with a goat though more frequently it was believed to belong to the deer "family".

The image of sharabha was popular also in the Buddhist literature. It is the main personage of two Buddhist *jātakas*, the didactic stories of previous births of the Buddha. According to the Buddhists, the Buddha, at times assumed forms of various human beings, animals and deities. Though religious works, the *jātakas* contain popular legends, fables, and various folkloristic motifs connected with very ancient mythological notions.

"In a secluded place where you would not come across any person and would not hear human voice, a place untrodden by the wheel of chariot or a carriage, untrodden by any traveller... lived the Buddha in the guise of a sharabha, endowed with strength, speed and a very sound, large body..." Once a king, while hunting wild animals, lost his way and found himself in that far-off place in the forest. Seeing the sharabha, he almost directed his bow towards it when the swift beast started running. "On the way, the sharabha saw a large cleft and, jumping across it swiftly as if it were no more than a meadow, ran further." This and also another *jātaka* particularly stress the special strength of the sharabha and its exceptional deftness which helped it to evade the fatal arrow even of the most experienced hunter. The *jātaka* tells us that the sharabha was somehow surrounded by experienced hunters who boasted of overtaking the beast swiftly. But the sharabha was deft, evaded the shot so skilfully that the hunters could not shoot it, and it was able to slip away like swift wind.

Thus, what sort of fabulous animal of the Indian legends is this, this eight-footed forest dweller, sharabha, having tremendous strength and speed and invulnerable even to the fatal arrows of skilful hunters of the earth ? Is it perhaps a purely legendary animal, owing its existence in Indian stories exclusively to conjecture ? No, the wild beast, sharabha, is not a figment of imagination of ancient Indians. It is "los",

animal of the northern forests, which, at one time, was obviously known to the remote ancestors of the Indians in their ancestral home.

The ancient Indian word "sharabha", as also shown towards the beginning of this century by the Hungarian scholar, B. Munkacsi, corresponds to the words "sarp" "shorp" used for "los" amongst such Ugric peoples living beyond the Urals as the Khanty and Mansi. The direct relationship of these words is also confirmed by a comparison of ancient Indian legends about the many-footed sharabha with the Ugric traditions about the "los". Here, for instance, is one of the legends prevalent amongst the Ugrians living at the river Ob, and recorded in the 19th century by N.L. Gondatti. At first, the los inhabited the sky, and was six-footed. Nobody could catch up with it as it moved very swiftly. But it became proud and began bragging of its strength and agility. The god of the upper world, Numi-Torum, came to know of this, and sent a bogatyr from heaven to punish it. The wonderful bogatyr followed the los all over heaven for a long time, and ultimately caught it chopped its two hind legs off and threw them down to the earth. The los was now left only with four legs, and it became the private possession of man. The memory of the six-footed los, the legend mentions, remained in the sky in the form of the Great Bear constellation, and the path along which the hunter from the heaven had followed the los is nothing else but the Milky way. According to another version of the same legend, the god, Tungk-pok, hunted the six-footed los, for a long time, by following it, in the sky, on skis made of sacred wood. The hunter managed to catch up with it, and was able to chop off two of its legs only when it alighted upon a stony cape. The celestial los thus became an ordinary animal of the earth, living in the taiga forests of the North.

A similar theme of the hunting of the sacred los linked to particular cosmological notion is well known also from the ethnographical materials gathered from amongst the Evenks. The Soviet ethnographer, G.M. Vasilevich, recorded several versions of this legend. Three hunters set off in the pursuit of los ; but when they saw the heavenly animal, the chief

marksman who had taken upon himself to catch it easily, got scared and fled away. The hunt of the heavenly los therefore continues right to this day : it appears as if the four stars of the Great Bear constellation are the los, and other three —the hunters.

In the context of the Indian conceptions of sharabha some details of the Siberian legends of "los" merit special attention. The heavenly los lives in the taiga of the Upper, world : during the day it hides itself there and remains invisible to the earthly beings ; in the night it ascends the peaks of the mountains and makes its appearance among other inhabitants of the sky in the form of the Great Bear. According to the legends of the Evenks, the change of the day and night is linked to it : the los supposedly runs out of the Taiga and climbs the peak of the mountain from where it can reach the sun.

Such legends of the sacred los are fixed also amongst many other peoples of the North—from the basin of the Yenisei to Finland. Equally prevalent is the use of the word "los" to designate the Great Bear constellation connected with this legend. (It is interesting that the same word was also in use in Rus, apparently after the familiarity with the mythological conceptions of the peoples living in the forests in the north of Europe). On the basis of archaeological materials and rock reliefs, academician A.P. Oklannikov showed that the image of los and its relationship to the sun were one of the most ancient motifs of the general cosmological views of many peoples of the North.

The ancient Indian theme of sharabha, the many-footed swift animal of the forest, was obviously a reflection of the very early conceptions about "los" prevalent amongst the peoples of the forest zone of the North. Besides, the origin of the Indian tradition about sharabha can be directly associated with the mythology of the Ugric peoples, for it is precisely there that we find the coincidence of such an unusual detail as the manyfootedness (six or eight feet) of the sharabha and similarity of the words used to designate it—sharabha ; sharp; sorp (the Evenkian and other languages of Siberia use different words for designating los).

More detailed accounts of the fabulous beast, sharabha, are available in the works of the classical period of ancient Indian religious and secular literature when this motif, borrowed at one time, was supplemented with totally different themes and became a part of the over-all folkloristic tradition of the peoples of Indostan. But there are data which enable us to affirm that the sharabha was known already to the authors of the early Vedic literature and even of the *Ṛgveda*. In the *Atharvaveda*, an early vedic monument, one of the *mantras* is devoted to sharabha : "You, 0 exiled sharabha, resembling the goat, can overcome difficult accessible places." In the *Ṛgveda* sharabha is mentioned in the hymn to Indra in the context of such important theme of the mythology of the Vedic Aryas as the stealing of soma. It is worth noting that sharabha appears here as some mythical personage associated with heavenly sphere and is counted among the divine *rishis*.

Thus, the animal of the northern forests, los—sharabha became a part of the folk tradition of hot India in the same way as the legends of polar regions and polar phenomena remained an integral part of the sacred literature and epos of the peoples of this South Asian country.

Religious Beliefs

NORTHERN SHAMANISM AND THE OLDEST RELIGION OF THE ARYAS

Holy sages of the Indian epos set forth, "flying" of birds, for the inaccessible lands of the distant north. Aristeas also made his "flight" to the distant north beyond Scythia. Such travels by air may be considered a part of shamanistic rituals. This view is supported by numerous studies in ethnography and history of religion, primarily of the peoples of the North.

A shaman, while performing such rituals, writes the eminent Soviet ethnographer, Professor S.A. Tokarev, often falls unconscious. This must automatically lead the spectators to believe that his "soul" has flown away. The delirium and hallucinations of the shaman frequently consist in his seeing the distant lands and loudly describing his wanderings.

The travellers and ethnographers of the 19th and early 20th centuries have left detailed descriptions of shamanistic rituals performed by various peoples of Siberia. Describing, for instance, a shamanistic ritual in the early 20th century, V.I. Anuchin wrote: "The shaman, dressed in special robes, artificially leads himself into a state of excitement, and then starts singing and beating a tambourine, as if invoking the spirits. When all spirits are gathered together, the shaman announces it by giving out a specially sharp cry and, at the same time, makes a few jumps, ...the spirits are ready to lift the shaman. At last, the spirits appear to "raise" the shaman up, to the clouds, for seeing the horizon. In a song

the shaman narrates what he exactly sees : "I am already high. A hundred versts upwards and a hundred versts downwards I am seeing Yenisei. Here is a tent. Who is there? Aha, this is the old Sintip sleeping here ... O spirits, raise me higher. I shall see further...". The shaman, gradually giving himself out in the song, ascends to the sky, descends to the underground, flies to all the lands of the world, undergoes many transformations. Usually, he transforms himself into a bird or employs the services of a bird-spirit."

According to the account of a Nganasan shaman (as recorded by A.A. Popov), he was supposedly called a bird and flew long along the sea-shore, reaching as far as the high mountain where the mistress of the waters lived. The shaman had to cross the roads of all the worlds; he "travelled" to the lower world, to the endless sea, and finally "returned" to earth, "perceiving" the mysteries of seeing all and hearing all, even the whisper of the grass.

According to the religious notions prevalent amongst many peoples of the North, a shaman could prophesy the future, warn of the impending misfortunes, send his soul to distant regions to "know what is happening there"; only after the "return" of the soul did a shaman determine the fate of the sufferer. A shaman was believed to heal diseases, to be capable of warding off evil spirits. Assuming the form of a bird, he chases away the "culprit" of disease. "Turning into crows we shall dash off smoothly ..., turning into hawks we shall observe from above ..., turning into eagles, we shall observe from all sides ..." (from the song of a Touvinian shaman, according to the materials of S.I. Vainshtein).

Similar notions were also observed in early 19th century among the Lapps (Saams) in the north of Scandinavia : the soul of a shaman separates from his body and assumes the forms of various animals; like a deer it rushes along the earth, like a bird it soars in the air, like a fish it goes deep into the sea. This is how the shaman, though lying in a state of complete trance, "travels" in the various worlds; then his soul "returns", and the shaman "comes to life" again. The Lapps believed that a shaman could find out all that happened with his relatives living in distant places. In a state of ecstasy, a shaman sang

loudly, played on tambourine, and then fell down to earth, as if dying. The soul at this time "flew off" to where the shaman sent it. The believers awaited, with impatience, the return of the soul, which made the shaman "alive". According to the notions of the Lapps, a shaman had to have a special assistant who looked after his body while his soul 'wandered' and, when necessary, "looked for" the soul if it "did not return" for a long time.

The bird cult played a special role in northern shamanism : the shaman or his soul "set off", in the form of a bird, on distant travels, flying over familiar and mythical lands. The bird was the guardian of the shaman, the attributes of the shaman's costume were likened to the parts of the body of the bird and its plumage. According to the Finnish mythology, shamans are sons of the celestial god—eagle.

According to the religious notions current among the Ugrians on the river Ob, the soul assumes the form of a bird and departs to the next world. According to an Evenk legend, a person wanted to live in the upper world. He met out a large bird who said to him : "Save food, dress, water and wood for three years". He placed all this on the bird, and they ascended into the air. They flew for a long time; and at last he saw a flight of stairs leading to the upper world. He climbed it, but was driven away by a shaman from the celestial abode : "Go back to your land". The man again mounted the bird and flew back home where he told his kith and kin of his flight to the upper world. According to the notions of the Evenk shamans, a shaman could enter the upper (or the morning) world only at the time of performance of special rituals. Ordinary people could not penetrate into those regions. Special honour was shown to the crow; sacrifices were made to it. It is one of the main personages of shamainistic ritual dances.

The scholars compare the shamanistic ritual with the state of a nervous-hysterical fit. Shamans often resorted to artificial exciters, took various narcotics which led them into special excitement, ecstasy. This is attested by numerous evidences of ethnographers and travellers.

The materials cited about the shamanistic cult and religious

notions, sometimes prevalent among the peoples of the north, have many interesting and often direct analogies in the epic and religious tradition of ancient India, Iran and Scythia. Here we shall again recall Aristeas—the form of crow assumed by him, the specially possessed state in which he made his "voyage" to distant regions, the "flight" of the soul leaving his body lifeless, the accounts of the "wanderings" of the soul in the inaccessible land of the North. Or, Abaris—he "travelled" in air, crossing the seas and mountains; he could, at the time of his "wanderings", ward off diseases, make prophesies and even tame the winds and sea storms.

Some legends from the *Māhābharata* have also been cited earlier : about the "flights" of divine *rishis ;* about the "travels" of honoured sages, on birds, to various quarters of the world and specially to the northern abode of the "blessed" people; Muni Galava "flew", on the bird Garuḍa, to the summits of Meru, viewing the familiar and unfamiliar lands, flew "without feeling his body" ; the sage Narada "soared" like wind; yogi Suka "wandered" in the sky like a bird.

Not partaking, partaking (only) of air, soaring in air like birds, the great *rishis* in lunar quarters visit the excellent mountain (Meru)". No mortal can go there; this cannot even be thought of. But *rishis* come flying there; and "on the days of change (of quarters) of moon in this mountainous region, sounds of drums, tambourines, shells, reed-pipes are heard." The epic account mentions that three great *rishis*, with divine help, set off for the northern slope of Meru at the coast of the Milky sea, and reached the Great island. But they could not see anything because of radiance, and a voice from the sky told : "You, *munis*, go away, at once, from where you have all come!"

Specific features of shamanism may also be found in the description of one of the main gods of Hinduism, Śiva (also called Rudra). Religions texts portray the unusual image of this "deity of mighteous power and ecstasy". With dishevelled hair he dances in heaven, giving out loud cries; like a lunatic he leads the mad people. After the dance he falls in ecstasy, gets intoxicated with sacred drinks; he arrives at the summit of Meru and strikes terror in all who see him.

It is significant that the Greek writers who had taken part in Alexander Macedonian's campaign in India, called this Indian god Dionysus and reported that the worshippers of Dionysus in India performed Bachhic rites, danced, fell into ecstasy, played on cymbals, beat the drums and rang the bells. Obviously following the Indian tradition, the Hellenes who had been to India also linked Dionysus-Śiva with the sacred mountain of Meru.

The most interesting data on shamanistic features in the oldest religious notions of the Indians are found preserved in the *Ṛgveda*. One of the hymns in the *Ṛgveda* mentions the Long-Haired One (*Keshin*) and sages-munis dressed in brown, soiled garments, with belts of wind, who, being in ecstasy, follow the flight of the wind. 'Excited, we rise on the winds like our horses, and you, the mortals, may see only our bodies. The Long-Haired one, the true friend of the gods in all their origins, - the hymn states,—soars in the air, viewing everything around from above. He moves after the apsaras, gandharvas and winged celestial animals-birds; Vayu, the god of wind, gives him the intoxicating drink when, along with the god, Rudra, he drinks the intoxicating juice from the cup. Like the Long-Haired one, in frenzy, sages-munis soar in the sky, and the mortals see only their bodies left on earth.

"Turbulent winds carried me atop - I had drunk some; the soma juices brought me atop, and the five peoples seemed to me like pecks of dust ..., one wing of mine is in the sky; the other I have left below - I am drunk of Soma! I ascended to the clouds—I am drunk of Soma!" This text of the *Ṛgveda* is usually treated as a boastful story of the god intoxicated with the sacred drink of soma. As opined by the well-known philologist, D.N. Ovsyaniko-Kulikovsky (1853-1920), the hymn describes not the intoxication of the god but that of state man who, having taken the intoxicating soma, has fallen into ecstasy. Obviously, this is the ecstatic excitation of the priest who has comprehended the mysteries of the intoxicating drink. Having drunk soma, he "rises" to the sky, "soars" in the form of a bird and appears to "view", from above, the people of the earth, looking like a mote in the eye.

DRINK OF IMMORTALITY

The ritual of soma occupied an important place in the religion of the ancient Aryas. One of the ten books of the *Ṛgveda* and some hymns of other books are wholly devoted to soma. The word "soma" - Iranian "haoma" - is formed from the verb *su* (hu), meaning "to squeeze", "to prepare juice". By soma-haoma was implied the plant and the juice derived therefrom, and also the deity (Soma). The idea of this sacred plant goes to the common Aryan period. The *Ṛgveda* and *Avesta* give similar descriptions of the method of preparing the intoxicating drink, soma. The juice extracted from the plant was passed through a filter and filled into vessels where it got mixed with water, milk, barley grains, sour milk. The mixture obtained was fermented to acquire a special taste and capacity of exercising a stimulating effect. The soma was drunk by priests at the time of ritual ceremonies and sacrifices; it was poured on the sacrificial fire, and offered in sacrifice to various gods. It was regarded as the drink of immortality (*amṛta*) of the gods; haoma was also likewise said to "give immortality". The ancient Indians and Iranians believed that this drink gave the gods unbounded power and might. The man who squeezed and prepared soma, and drank it, also gained long life, freedom from diseases, energy and vital strength.

In Zoroastrism, as well as in the Vedic religion and Hinduism, offering of haoma-soma has been one of the main parts of the sacred ritual, an act of devotion to the gods. The ritual of soma had such a significance already in the common Aryan period. In ancient Vedic and Avestan works, intoxication with soma and haoma is regarded as something divine, sacred, different from other forms of intoxication which are censured. One of the Vedic works, *Śatapatha-Brāhmaña*, mentions : "Soma is prosperity and light; sura is unhappiness and darkness" (sura implies the usual "mundane" intoxicating drink). A similar statement is found in the *Avesta*. All other intoxicating drinks lead to the demon of anger and fury, but this drink of haoma alone leads to the sacred truth.

The ancient features of the cult of soma are more distinctly expressed in the Vedas. Soma is the drink and deity of ecstasy;

it is the state of ecstasy itself, the excitation of a special kind, somehow revealing the mysteries of the divine power : "Passion and fury bubble, O drop of soma". "We have drunk soma, we have become immortal, we have attained light, we have found gods", reads one of the hymns of the *Ṛgveda*.

The cult of soma was closely associated with magical singing. Sacred incantations (*mantras*) were chanted by priests at the time of preparing soma and at libations. Hymns about soma were sung in a state of ecstasy. "Singing excites soma, exactly as the rider drives the horse". And at the same time, the authors of the sacred texts believed that soma itself gave rise to hymns, that it was the father of hymns, the master of song. One drunk with soma is like a singer; coming to ecstasy, he is at the same time a magician knowing the power of divine incantations.

Soma was loudly cheered by the sagacious,
The singers at the head of the sacrifice,
Having the loved one before their eyes.

The authors of the hymns believed that, like the winds, soma carried aloft those who subscribed to its sacraments, and that it could take the believer to the immortal, inviolable abode of the gods where "there are shining worlds ..., where there is the highest place of the sun ... and where joy and happiness abound".

Since the late 18th century, right to this day, scholars have been carrying on heated discussions as to what plant is "concealed" behind soma (haoma). The soma has been identified with heather, a variety of mushrooms, ephedra, cannabis etc. By the time the scholars became interested in this question, the followers of Hinduism and Zoroastrism had already been using different plants for preparing the ritual drink.

Attempts to ascertain precisely what plant the ancestors of the Indo-Iranians called soma have hardly yielded any results. In the course of their centuries-old history the ancestors of the Avestan Iranians and Indian Aryas dispersed on vast territories with varying geographical conditions climate

and vegetation. Following their cultic traditions they prepared ritual drinks finding suitable plants for the purpose : in different geographical zones different "fruits of earth" giving the desired cultic effect served as such plants. Already in early Indian works is fixed the position according to which traditional form of soma was allowed to be replaced by some other plants—grasses, cereals or shrubs. But all these were to have the same properties, have euphoric effect. Already, Sāyana, an early commentator of the *Ṛgveda*, wrote that if it was not possible to obtain exactly the same soma which was referred to in the holy writ, one could take "putiku", a specific type of whirling plant, and in its absence, the black grass "arjunani". The ritual texts permit the use of barley grains or of some varieties of odorous grasses etc., as "substitutes" of soma.

The modern Zoroastrians, the Parsis, usually use ephedra for preparing haoma. It has also been suggested in some works of the 19th century, this suggestion is also accepted by many modern scholars, that the ephedra itself is the plant which the ancestors of the Indian Aryas called soma.

CANNASIS, HYOSCYAMUS, AMANITA

Still another interesting substitute for soma is cannabis. Some scholars believe that the effect of the narcotic obtained from the Indian cannabis corresponds most to that ascribed to soma in the *Ṛgveda*. Beginning with the *Atharvaveda*, many ancient Indian works refer to "bhanga", cannabis and a stimulating drink obtained from it. The same word in modern Indian languages, "bhang", or "bang", means the virulent drink mixed with the stimulating drug or inhaled at the time of smoking.

In remote antiquity, these properties of cannabis were known to the Iranian tribes, including the Scythians, who put it to good use in cultic rites. The Scythians "set up three long poles which lean against each other, and stretch round them their woollen mantles. After closing them together as closely as possible, they throw red-hot stones into a vessel placed in

the midst of these poles and mantles. There is a kind of hemp which grows in their country very much resembling flax, though far thicker and larger in size. It grows there both wild and cultivated ... . The seed of this hemp is taken by the Scythians and thrown on to red-hot stones, by crawling underneath the mantles and the poles. It smokes as it burns and produces a vapour unequalled by any Hellenic pyre. They become ecstaticized by this vapour and begin to cry aloud ...".

Herodotus has interpreted this Scythian custom as a special ritual of purification after burial. But, in all probability, his account reflects a rite of shamanistic nature (such a view based on large ethnographical and historical material was put forward in 1935 by K. Meuli). Here, the "crying aloud" of the person inside the mantled "tent" (*yourta*) is nothing but the singing of the person who is serving the cult, i.e. of the "shaman", led to the state of ecstasy under the effect of the stupefying smoke of the burning seeds of hemp. Modern archaeological materials, the finds of the Scythian kurgans of Altai of the 5th-4th centuries B.C. (excavations carried out by S.I. Rudenko) — directly corroborate the report of Herodotus and the view that the custom described above may be a part of the Scythian religious ritual. Found preserved under the layer of perennial frost are small huts (*shalashs*) consisting of long poles bound at the top (two of these have roofs, of mantle and leather). Some copper vessels have been discovered in one of the kurgans under such a structure. These vessels are found to contain seeds of cannabis which have sometimes been burnt in the fire of stone and are thus partly charred. To the long pole of one of the "huts" is bound a leather bag having seeds of cannabis. A similar shamanistic rite, performed in the yourta or tent, is found described in ethnographical literature. A Touvinian shaman, for instance, placed on a small table a vessel with burning juniper, sprayed some milk over it and began shamanizing to the accompaniment of shamanistic songs.

Herodotus' *History* preserves one more interesting evidence of this type, this time, about those kindred tribes of the

Scythians which dwelt to the west of Central Asia : "[They] found trees yielding such fruit as they could, gathering in groups at one place and lighting a fire and sitting around it, throw into the fire; inhaling the smell of these fruits thrown in the fire and burning. They thus get as intoxicated as the Hellenes get from wine. They get more and more intoxicated as they throw more and more fruit [into the fire], and eventually start dancing and singing". It may be assumed that a shamanistic type of zeal has been described here.

The Greek lexicographer, Gezichus, mentions that cannabis was such a powerful "Scythian smoking" that it made one who performed this ritual perspire. The Frankians, the neighbours of the Scythians, also prepared a sacred drink from cannabis.

The materials cited about the cultic role of cannabis in the religious rites of ancient Indians, Iranians and Scythians enable us to assume that the ancestors of the Indo-Iranians also knew of the narcotic properties of cannabis and that they prepared a "sacred" ritual drink from it. It is significant that the ancient Indian name of cannabis and its extract, "bhanga" goes back to the common Aryan period : the same word is known in the *Avesta* ("bhanga", "banha" - name of the plant and of the product obtained from it). It is however possible that, in the *Avesta*, it is not necessarily cannabis but hyoscyamus, later, in Iran and also in the Zoroastrian tradition, the word "bhang" meant precisely hyoscyamus and the narcotics prepared from it. There are varying data on the use of hyoscyamus, in ancient times and the early medieval period, and its properties to induce state of ecstasy.

In the *Avesta*, "bhanga" is directly related to the cult of the deity of ecstasy, magic and soothsaying. Besides, the Avestan "bhanga" is not only the plant and its product but also the state of cultic ecstasy. As also in the case of soma-haoma, it is difficult to ascertain what exactly is "hidden" behind the name "bhanga". In the historical period various plants possessing narcotic properties have been called as such.

There is an interesting evidence of the familiarity with "bhanga" of the ancestors of the Finno-Ugric peoples, a fact indicating the relationship of religious conceptions of the

Indo-Iranians with that of the tribes of the northern zone. In the Ugric languages, the Khanty and Mansi word "pangh" or "panh" is, in its origin, connected with "bhanga", and means amanita, an infusion of amanita and "intoxication" (drunk). In the Mordvian and Mari languages, "panga" simply means "mushroom." The travellers and ethnographers of the 19th century have noticed the special role of amanita in the cult of the shaman among the Ugrians of Transurals. Before shamanizing, the shamans ate amanita or drank its infusion, thus bringing themselves to a state of greatest ecstasy. It was thought that the shamans drank amanita to associate themselves with the gods, to understand the language of the spirits and to learn from them what is treasured. Similar data can also be found in the folklore of the Khanty and Mansi. In their legends the shaman was called an "amanita-eating person" : "Where you find a shaman, you will find an amanita eating person." One of the epic legends of Mansi, recorded by the well known Soviet ethnographer and archaeologist, R.N. Chernetsov, describes how search was made for a shaman : "God went, brought the shaman. A big kettle having amanita was placed on fire. Shaman started soothsaying, ate amanita, beat the drum, and prophesied the future".

Recently, the American scholar, R. Wasson, expressed the view that the soma of *Ṛgveda* was nothing but amanita. R. Wasson proceeded primarily from the description of soma in the hymns of the *Ṛgveda* though he also took into account the relevant data on the narcotic properties of amanita and on its application in cultic practice. This point of view has not yet received much acceptance in the Indological literature, but many Vedic hymns do indeed often give soma the epithets which make it resemble amanita in appearance. Soma is usually described as a plant without leaves, flowers, fruit or roots but having stem and cap (literally, "head") similar to an eye. Soma is described as red and sun-like, shining during the day in the rays of the sun and becoming silvery and moon-like during the night, the juices extracted from soma are golden.

The notions of the relation of the shamanistic cult with

ammanita and other narcotics survive in the religious practices not only of the Ugrian but also of other peoples of the North. Shamans made use of various stimulants to bring themselves into ecstasy.

The materials cited about the cult of soma in the traditions of India, Iran and Scythia supplement substantially the picture of "shamanistic features" in the ancient religious systems of the tribes and peoples of these lands. The said features of shamanism can, of course, be looked upon as the reflection of archaic form of religious consciousness, fixed amongst many peoples of the world at a spec ific stage of their development. The elements of shamanism were, apparently, there in the religion of the Aryas during the time of the Indo-Iranian unity and in the period immediately following it. These could then have been supplemented as a result of the contacts of the Indo-Aryans and Iranians with the non-Aryan tribes of India and Iran whose religion could also have the features of shamanism. But the study of the religious and mythological conceptions of ancient Indians, Iranians and Scythians vis-a-vis the religious views recorded by the ethnographers of the 18th-early 20th centuries amongst a number of peoples of Siberia and Northern Europe, enables us to state a different fact : The religious tradition of the Indo-Iranian peoples has retained not only individual shamanistic beliefs but also the totality of the whole row of substantial characteristics of northern shamanism itself. Of course, the religions of the Avestan and Vedic tribes did not, in any measure, lead to shamanism and were better developed religious systems ; but it is extremely significant that, even in much later periods, elements of northern shamanism continued to be prevalent in the mythological conceptions and religious practices of the Indo-Aryans and Iranians.

STEALING OF SOMA

The Indian and Iranian traditions have preserved many legends about soma and haoma. In these the central place is occupied by the myth of the stealing of the sacred plant. According to the Indian tradition, the soma was not first

available to the human beings. It was the creation of the gods and was to be had at the loftiest summit, the place of sky itself. But it was stolen from its inaccessible heights by a swift bird, rushing at wind's speed. The Vedic priests glorified this bird who had brought the life-giving drink, the source of their sacred and poetic inspiration. A special hymn is devoted in the *Ṛgveda* to this stealing of soma : "...With loud cry, from heaven, down sped the Bird carrying soma, and brought it from over the lofty summit, to the friends of Indra ; then wildly raging in his mind, the archer Krishanu aimed and loosed the string to strike him...but down fell only a flying feather of the Bird hasting forward in his journey".

This very legend, in a more detailed form, survives in later Vedic works. The *Brāhmaṇas* : mention that high, in the distant world, was soma ; and the gods and sages wished to have this sacred plant to revel in the drink of immortality. They deputed birds. Holding soma in their beaks and claws, the beautiful-winged [birds] stole it. The legend also mentions Krishanu who guarded soma and shot an arrow at the sacred bird. Later on, in the epos, this theme of stealing of soma was supplemented with new details and more detailed descriptions. The image of the sacred bird became all the more colourful.

The hymns of the *Ṛgveda* call soma celestial, having been brought from the heaven but, at the same time, grown on a mountain and stolen from its summit. "Just as Agni was brought from the heaven, so also did the Bird steal soma from the mountain." (from the hymn to Agni and Soma). This mountain was portrayed as great, "reaching the sky". The epos places the soma and the god Soma on Meru : the *soma-amṛta* "which the gods drink" is located in that northern quarter where the sun rises for half-a-year.

On the sacred mountains, Hara Berezaiti, the creator-god planted haoma "decorated by the stars". The *Avesta* states that he fixed the place for god Haoma on the loftiest summit of Hara. It was from there that haoma was taken to the earthly world : "the god placed you, Haoma, the hero created by the creator, on the Haraiti mountains. And then sacred birds carried you away from there in all directions (further, the text mentions real geographical regions known to

the authors of the hymns), ...and since then you, diverse, succulent, golden Haoma, are growing there".

There is no doubt that both the myths of the *Avesta* and the *Ṛgveda*—convey the same ancient tradition going back to the common Aryan period : the sacred ritual plant was, at one time, located on the great mythical mountains, and was, from there, carried away by the Bird (birds) to the earthly world. (Numerous concrete details are the same in both the legends. The *Avesta*, for instance, mentions Haoma's enemy—Krisani, corresponding to the Vedic archer Krishanu).

This conclusion permits us again to return to the same passage of the *Ṛgveda* which was analysed in the section "Rhipaean Mountains in the *Ṛgveda*" : the summits of Ripa are the place of abode of the Bird, the path of the sun, the abode of the "enjoyment" of the deities, "hub" is the centre of the earth. Similar motifs are associated with soma in other hymns dedicated to it : "On the hub of the earth is soma—the pillar of the sky" "soma is where the sun is ... in the inviolable world of immortality, where there is the highest place of sun..., where there are joy and enjoyment." In these texts, as also in the passage about Ripa, "enjoyment" is not merely pleasure and joy but a state of ecstatic excitement (such is the literal meaning of the words used in the text). The "Bird" on the summit of the 'Ripa' is, obviously, the same as the bird Śyena of the other hymns of the *Ṛgveda*.

A comparison of the texts analysed shows that these reflect the same cycle of notions. Later, during the period of the formation of the epos, the myth of the great mountains and of the stealing of soma underwent considerable changes. However, the ancient tradition continued to survive in the epos, though the mountain were now called Meru and the bird—Garuḍa.

The commentators and modern investigators of the *Ṛgveda* describe Śyena as an eagle or a falcon, but the authors of the Vedic hymns did not apparently have any real bird in view. In the same way, in the *Avesta*, the Saena (corresponding to Indian Śyena) is a mythical bird or some powerful bird-like creature. Many legends were current in ancient

India about Garuḍa. One of the main legends is that of the stealing of *soma-amṛta*, the drink of immortality. The epos portrays the colourful appearance of Garuḍa, the "king of the winged" with its body of gold, wings of dazzling red colour, head of a human being and possessing claws. The Garuḍa could speak the human speech. It possessed the power of the magic word and could, at its will, change its appearance.

The Garuḍa was endowed with such great might that it could shake mountains, lift a huge elephant in the air, and could, like a cloud, shadow the whole earth. When Garuḍa sat on the sacred trees, these bent and their gigantic branches and stumps, the nest of thousands of usual birds, bent down and even broke off. It was a terror for all who stood in its path. And this is how the epos describes the struggle of Garuḍa for *soma-amṛta* : Learning that a "bird of immeasurable strength" intends to steal soma, the gods and the divine guards of *amṛta*, along with the thunderer Indra, stood surrounding it. Resolute, they were dressed in costly armour of gold. The battle began. The bird gave out "a loud cry, like the thunder of a massive cloud, terrifying all beings. And then the king of the winged flew in the air, killing its enemies-heroes ... . Injured by its claws and beak, they shed much blood. Harrassed and frightened by Garuda, the gods stepped back ... . The Best of the winged ones went in for *amṛta*".

In the epos and in the Buddhist literature Garuḍa is usually called the "eater of snakes"; it is the perennial enemy of *nagas* (snakes) and their mighty leaders. Garuḍa usually lived on great mountains and sacred trees. Soaring upwards to the sky, it often carried on itself gods or other "celestial wanderers". It could take holy sages to far-off inaccessible quarters, even to Mount Meru.

As also in the legend of the stealing of soma, the image of Garuḍa-Śyena reflects ancient mythological conceptions of the Indo-Iranian tribes. The Iranian bird "Saena" in the Avestan tradition is endowed with many of those features which the sacred bird of the Indian mythology has. Like Śyena-Garuḍa, it is also associated in the Iranian legends with the wonderful plant of immortality.

Many mythological motifs of ancient legends in the *Shah-nama* have already been investigated and have acquired a more real, "earthly" colouring. But even in this work, it is not difficult to discern, in the description of Simurgh, characteristic features of the sacred bird of the ancient Aryan mythology. Simurgh lives on Alburz (from still earlier Persian "Har-burz"; Hara Berezaiti of the *Avesta*). "There was a mountain, and its name was Alburz, nearing the sun [in height] and far from [association with] men; and here the Simurgh had its nest ... ." This mountain rose from the earth to the stars; its summits were inaccessible; the approaches to it were desolate and empty; none, neither human being nor animal, had the strength to reach there. But over this impassable place Simurgh could take any one who was in quest of its location. Thus it took the young Zal to Alburz and then brought the knight with "elephant-like body" back to earth.

The *Shah-nama* also gives another image of Simurgh—the fearsome bird, bringing ruin, obstructing the forbidden path : "The path thither is threatened by the attack of Simurgh and by snowstorm which destroys cedars" :

Like Garuḍa, Simurgh was prepared to fight a whole army : "Like a cloud it descended and by the sweep of its wings extinguished the shining of the celestial luminaries".

The image of the benevolent Simurgh in the *Shah-nama* was associated with Zal. Zal was considered a magician, a "grey sorcerer". He learnt the secrets of magic from Simurgh. The sacred bird had a reputation for being prophetic, the future was "open" to it. The Simurgh could speak in the human voice, it taught Zal the language of human beings. In the *Shah-nama* Simurgh is called the "king of birds" but how concrete then was the conception of the image of the wonderful bird remains obscure. In any case, the Simurgh is not a real bird in Firdausi's account. Early medieval Zoroastrian works, usually transmitting the tradition of the Sasanian period (3rd-7th centuries A.D.) call Simurgh a "dog-bird". And, in the monuments of Sasanian art (silver dishes, pitchers, rock reliefs, fibres) Simurgh is indeed portrayed as a winged creature with features of a fabulous bird and of a beast of prey of the canine species.

The massive bird Saena soars over high mountains and covers them like a cloud, the *Avesta* states. Saena often flies to the "all-healing" tree and every time it sits on it a thousand branches break and fall from the sacred tree. Great and mighty, it is larger than all birds and the first of all feathered creatures to be created (in the *Ṛgveda*, Garutmat-Garuḍa is also called "first born"). Zoroastrian texts count Saena among birds but describe it as having the teeth of a bird of prey and some other traits of an animal. On the whole, this legendary bird, Saena, is many faceted it has "three natures", "three images". This bird also appears, under the name of Simurgh in Firdausi's *Shah-nama*. Simurgh is the modern Persian form of the ancient Iranian "Saina-*mrga*" -lit. : "Saina-bird".

The iconographic image of Simurgh in the Sasanian art was studied in detail by K.V. Trever, Corresponding Member of the Academy of Sciences of the U.S.S.R. According to his conclusions, the image of this bird-beast, closest to the "Sasanian" form, is fixed already in some objects discovered from the Scythian burial mounds of the Black Sea region of the 6th-5th centuries B.C. On a golden plate found in a burial mound of the 5th century, in the portrayal of this winged being, K.V. Trever writes, a dog is quite distinctly seen with sharp teeth. A golden chased object from a burial mound of the 6th century B.C. shows a flying semi-animal semi-bird holding, in its preying beak, the head of a large snake which somehow is curled around its body. These monuments of Scythian art enable us to assume that legends of fabulous bird were prevalent in Scythia — like those narrated in ancient India and Iran about Śyena-Garuḍa and Saena-Simurgh.

MYTHOLOGICAL IMAGES OF NORTHERN LEGENDS

Similar legends were also known to the Finno-Ugric peoples of the North-Eastern Europe and Trans-Urals whose distant fore fathers were neighbours of the Scythians (and, earlier, as already mentioned, also of the Aryan tribes in the Indo-Iranian period).

The fabulous bird in the legends of the Khanty and Mansi is called "Winged" or "Celestial Kars". S. Patkanov who, in the late 19th century, made a thorough study of the folklore of the Khanty of Trans-Urals, gives the following description of this bird : "[It is] of gigantic size with a head like that of a human being and with a large beak. Behind its arms with long and sharp claws are two powerful wings. The Winged Kars can speak in human voice. Having great strength, it can carry a man on its back. In the legends of the Mansi, the Kars sometimes plays the role of a monster who destroys houses and settlements or, on the other hand, renders help to the hero and carries him on its back to far-off lands, even to the northern ocean. "Sit between my shoulders ... Flies away, carries ... Came flying to the Arctic ocean, got down" (from the legends of the Mansi, recorded by V.N. Chernetsov).

This image of the fabulous bird of the mythology of the peoples of Ural fully corresponds to that of the Iranian Simurgh and Indian Garuḍa. Of course, it should not be affirmed that this is the same very image that already existed in the mythology of the Indo-Iranian tribes and their neighbours in the common Aryan period. Conception of the particular appearance of this legendary bird, as found described in the tradition of India, Iran and Trans-Urals, could have appeared also as a result of independent development, or in connection with much later contacts, or as a part of the widespread "vagrant themes". Similar features of the fabulous bird may be found in the legends of various other peoples, for example, in those of the Arabs (the bird Rukh) and the Russians (bird Zhar). It may nonetheless be assumed that the images of Garuḍa, Simurgh and of the wonderful, gigantic bird of the Ural mythology, in their basis, go back to the same, very early source.

Archaeological and ethnographical materials show that the large "wonder-bird" became a part of the circle of mythological images, prevalent amongst the remote ancestors of the Finno--Ugric peoples of the North-Eastern Europe and Urals. Already in the 19th century, scholars paid attention to the large number of metallic images, found in these areas, of the

real and particularly fabulous animals, birds and bird-like creatures—popular images of the myths and legends of the Permian and Ugric peoples. One of the frequent subjects is that of the "bird", with human face depicted on the chest. The bird, quite frequently, has the figure of a full-size man on its body. Similar objects were discovered in the areas round Kama and in the Trans-Urals during excavations of the monuments of the archaeological cultures. This gave the scholars material for dating such finds (works of A.V. Zbrueva, A.P. Smirnov and V.N. Chernetsov). Metallic figures, including those depicting the birds with the human faces on their chests and of a man of the size of a bird, are witnessed in these territories for archeological cultures beginning from the second half of the first millenium B.C.

Side by side with the figures of mythical winged monsters, ritual images of real birds hawk, crow, falcon etc., have been widespread among the ancient tribes of the areas around the Kama and in the Trans-Urals.

The legends of the Evenks tell about a bird, which can carry on itself a man to the far-off land, the land of "eternal day". In one of the stories, which S. Patkanov records from the Khanty, the "Winged Kars" takes the hero from the lower world to upper. As has already been observed, similar notions existed in the Indian and Iranian traditions. However, in the religious beliefs of northern Shamanism, in comparison with the religions of the Indo-Iranians, such features formed a far more organic part of the system of general mythological views and religious rites. More vast is the very repertoire of the animals—real and supernatural, directly connected with the shamanistic beliefs : hybrid animals, bird-like creatures, birds.

The cultic images from the areas round Kama are often found to have the figures of fabulous creatures with the features of a bird or of a beast of prey. Usually, such a bird has the head of a wolf or a dog. The images of animal-like birds and of the fabulous winged beasts of prey, of "griffins" in the Urals are archaeologically witnessed from the materials of the Anan'ino culture (7th to 3rd centuries B.C.). The people of the regions around Kama, at that time, maintained animated

contacts with the tribes of the Scythian world, which is testified by the numerous finds of the Scythian products proper and also by the objects of the Near-East and Greek origin. Features of "animal style" are also characteristic of the art of Ananino' tribes. Here undoubtedly is the influence of the Scythian art. But, apparently, the reverse influence has also been there. Thus, the dog or wolf essence of the griffins could be connected with the mythological conceptions prevalent among the tribes of the Urals already in the very remote period, probably even before the formation of the Scythian art proper and its "animal style".

Obviously, the religious and mythological notions of the northern tribes influenced also the formation of the images of those personages of the Scythian epos whom the Greeks compared with Phorkides and Gorgons, making them the inhabitants of the far-off northern regions beyond Scythia. In the excavations of the monuments in the Urals of the end of the first millenium B.C., archaeologists have found metal plates with images of the winged creatures (sometimes, three-headed), with the Medusa-image female faces on the chests. Obviously, local notions and iconographic features taken from the Greek tradition through the Scythian have merged into one in the images of these fabulous creatures.

One more mythological theme of the Scythian epos connected with the legends of the peoples of the north is that of the mighty north wind. Among the Ugric peoples of Trans-Urals there was a belief that there existed two personified winds—South and North ; the latter corresponding to the Scythian "Boreas" was called Lui-Vot-Oika (—Old North Wind). The word "vot" or "vat" for "veter", (wind), forming a part of this name, is of Aryan origin ; in the ancient Indian and Iranian religious works the deity of the wind—*vata*—is also referred to as *Vata*. The notion of the existence of various personified winds, *vata* and the contrast of the north wind to the south survive in the Iranian tradition.

The examples cited show how deep and close were the mutual associations between the ancient Indo-Iranian and Finno-Ugric tribes, which was reflected in their mythological

and religious views. The long process of Aryan-Finno-Ugric cultural contacts also influenced the formation of the northern cycle of mythology of the Indo-Iranians. Thus, one of the main motifs of this cycle—the inaccessible northern mountains, reaching the sky, has parallels in the ancient notions of the Ugric peoples of the Urals.

Particularly interesting is the report of the Russian Chronicles for the year 1096 : People went from Novgorod to Pechora and from there reached the lands of the Yugra (this name is related to the ethnonym "Ugri"). There they were told about the highest mountain reaching the sky, about the impassable route thereto.

In early 18th century, Grigorii Novitsky, the author of the *Short Description of the Ostyak People* [in Russian], one of the earliest ethnographical works in world literature had been to the Khanty of Trans-Urals. Novitsky mentions, in particular, that according to the reports of the Khanty, there exists a mountain "a very high rock, like a wall, and having a height as though reaching the clouds of the sky".

In these legends purely mythological motifs are mixed with real conceptions of the Urals. In Russia, the Urals were called by different names such as "Stone" "Big Stone", "Pillar", "Earth's Belt" (the name Ural proper came to be used in Russia only in the second half of the 18th century). The geographical atlas published by the Russian Academy of Sciences in 1807 also calls Urals the "earth's rocky zone". Such names are obviously associated with the ancient cosmological views of the Ugric tribes : The Ural range is the belt of the supreme god thrown by him from the sky, at the creation of the world. Since then, the belt stretches throughout the world, forming its fulcrum, and the great mountains (Urals) are the "centre of the earth".

This again takes us back to the ancient legends of the Indo-Iranian peoples : Great sacred mountains appeared at the time of the creation of the world ; these cover the earth with their roots, and somehow form its centre. The Indians, Iranians and Scythians called these mountains golden and held that there were golden lakes at their summits and that

golden streams flowed there. The Urals were also called golden ; the song about the sacred Urals as recorded by the Finn scholar, A. Kannisto, from amongst the Mansi in the beginning of the 20th century, mentions the lake with golden shores at the summit of the northern. Such legends were apparently associated only with the northern Urals both sides of which were inhabited by the Ugric tribes. The northern Urals alone were called the "earth's belt" (the name Ural was first used only for the Southern Urals). The Ugric legends about the highest mountain have many mythological motifs alongside concrete geographical basis. Legendary features are particularly distinct in the folkloristic tradition of the neighbours of the Ugric tribes.

Lastly, in the legends which were recorded by ethnographers from amongst the Ugric peoples of Transurals, parallelisms can also obviously be found to the "blessed" people of the Indian, Iranian and Scythian legends. Very interesting pieces of information are preserved in G. Novitsky's *Short Description of* the Ostyalc people. Quoting the words of the Khanty, he mentions that, "in the extreme north, near the ocean and ice", there is a special wind blowing from the north ; it waylays, strikes and kiles with its cruelty anyone it finds. (This is the "old north wind" of the legends of the Khanty and Mansi, obviously corresponding to the North wind of the Scythian tradition, to the trans-Scythian Boreas of the Greek authors ; beyond the abode of this North wind was located the land of the "blessed" of the Scythian epos, that of the Hyperboreans.)

And further on to the north, Novitsky continues, there is the land whose inhabitants are said to be celebrated for their beauty and intellect. The belief exists that it is possible to see that created human beauty, but it is not possible to hear anything from these people or to speak to them. Novitsky himself regarded such accounts as totally unauthentic and wrote that no people could live a natural life in the northern regions beyond the ocean. More than two thousand years before Novitsky, Herodotus also doubted the existence of the "land of the Blessed" at the distant Northern sea.

Both the scholars - the ancient Greek historian as well as the ethnographer of the time of Peter I were, of course, right in their assessments of the realness of the notions of the land of the "blessed" in the Northern ocean. There is no doubt that such themes are legendary in character, but the modern scholarship now has access to data which make it possible to ascertain the origin of such mythological conceptions. Thanks to the investigations of the scholars, primarily of the native ethnographers and folklorists, most valuable material has been collected. The folk tales and legends and the beliefs and cosmological ideas existing among the different peoples of the North in the 19th and early 20th centuries have been recorded and studied. Legends have been prevalent among many peoples of the north of Europe and Siberia that, in the far-off north, there are supposed to be lands inaccessible to the people of this earth. These are the abode of gods and spirits, an after-death abode of the souls of the dead. The legends of the Khanty and Mansi place this region in the lower reaches of the Ob river or in an island in the Arctic ocean. It is believed that life in this island is similar to that of the earth : there animals are hunted, people live in settlements, and only the sun and the moon are in halves (according to the materials of V.N. Chernetsov).

The Mansis believed that the souls of the dead were carried on the back of the bird, to the north, to the cold ocean. Among the earlier Evenkian conceptions of the world the theme of the "upper words" is interesting. This celestial abode has soft climate and happy life, beautiful pastures, lush grasses, convenient for the movement of the river, rich in fishes. Here, the sun shines all the year round and it is always warm. The Pole star serves as the entrance to the upper world; the shamans alone can reach its inhabitants and that too only upon the performance of "special" rituals.

If the people of this earth are somehow able to reach there in some unusual way, they remain invisible to the inhabitants of this land, and a shaman suggests to these strangers to come back to earth (according to the materials of G.M. Vasilevich). The conceptions of the "upper" and the "lower" world are, in

many ways, similar in the ancient legends of the Evenks and of some other peoples of the northern Europe and Siberia.

The legends and stories described above reflected mythological conceptions related to very old religious beliefs which appeared at a time when there was no clear distinction between the "upper" and the "lower" world. And both the cycles of notions of the world after death were, as academician A.P. Okladnikov observes, reconciled only later by the shamanistic religious casuistry. But all these "worlds" of the spirits, the blessed and the dead were, in ancient legends and beliefs of the Siberian peoples, usually associated with the distant north or directly with the Arctic ocean.

Like notions were observed by the ethnographers and folklorists in the legends of the western Finn peoples and Laplanders (Saami) of the Northern Scandinavia. These legends described the "lower world" ("Tuonela" of the Finnish legends), where life was the same as on this earth and where sun perpetually shines, where land abounds in gererous fields and abundant meadows. But the entrances and exits of this "land" are zealously guarded by the sad Tuoni ('Duodna' of the Laplanders), the master of the "kingdom of the dead".

These peoples also believed in the existence of "sacred mountains", the place where good spirits live, where the souls of the dead lead a happy life ; and where reign joy, gaiety, harmony and equity. A shaman helps to "reach" this happy mountainous abode. The Laplanders believed that, when at the time of shamanizing, a shaman lies motionless, his soul visits the "sacred mountains" (*vide* materials gathered in the 18th to early 20th centuries by the Scandinavian scholars, K. Wiklund, J. Qvigstad, K. Leem, E. Reuterskiold etc.).

According to the earlier beliefs of the western Finnish peoples, the soul, on its way to the "land of the dead", had dreadful ordeals in store. It could encounter snakes, monsters, evil spirits; it had to overcome dark rapids before approaching the "bridge" which led to the desired aim. The ancient magical songs of the Finns describe how the entrance to the "lower world" was guarded by its keeper. Beyond the "bridge", according to the ancient beliefs of the Karelians, opened the abode

of bliss, with lush grasses, wide fields, trees with fruit as sweet as honey. Here "assembled" magicians, sorcerers, shamans. This "land of the dead" was, in the Finnish legends, called the "Northern home" and was believed to be located "below, in the north". A more precise indication is found in the folkloristic tradition of the peoples of Northern Scandinavia : this "land" was supposed to be situated in the Northern Arctic ocean or in the "sea", Saraias.

"Saraias" is also one of those words of the Finnish language which have parallels in Indo-Iranian languages. Several other Finno-Ugric languages also have the same word for "sea"— "saras"in Khanty; "saris" in Mansi ; and "zarez" in Udmurt. The origin of this word is the same as that of the ancient Indian "jraias" (vast space "wide expanse") and the Iranian "zrais" ("sea"). Such a parallelism has been authentically established by linguists. But here one cannot help pondering that there are no seas or any significant watery expanses on the territories where the contacts between the Finno-Ugric and Indo-Iranian tribes could be established. The word "zraia" in the Iranian tradition implied the mythical watery expanse of Vourukasha located at the great northern mountains (Hara Berezaiti). It is noteworthy that the Finish word "sarias" also denotes the mythical sea proper in the distant north.

Thus the parallelisms observed again take us back to the "northern cycle" of the Aryan mythology and confirm once again its relationship to the cosmology and religion of the Finno-Ugric tribes. According to the *Avesta*, the soul of a dead persons "journeys" to the Chinvat bridge. Here it is awaited by some divine "lady", who takes some souls across the bridge to the paradisal abode of bliss, and others to the dark abyss lying under the crossing. The "beautiful" and "deft" mistress of the bridge, as the *Avesta* calls her is obviously a close relative of that "mistress" of the "lower world" of the northern mythology who "meets" the souls of the dead at the crossing.

Such a "crossing" over the underground river of the world after death is also described in the Indian epos. Thither "all must repair...here, men of wicked deeds not in tortures", and

he who is worthy "finds an end to his suffering; here the sun...going in the direction named after Vasistha (i.e. of the Great Bear) again releases the winter... . Here in the abodes of the regenerate *rishis*, in the paradisal bowers of the Mandara, the Gandharavas chant psalms, stealing away both heart and intellect... . Your way lies through this [crossing], 0 Galava." (from the account given by Garuḍa, in the *Mahābhārta*).

DIVINE COMEDY AND THE ZOROASTRIAN PRIESTS IN THE "OTHER WORLD"

The soul of Arda Viraf,separated from his body, set off for the Chakat-i-Daitık mountains and Chinvat bridge, and came back the seventh day, and entered the body again. Arda Viraf rose up, as if awakening from a pleasant sleep.... He was welcomed as one coming from the realm of the dead to this realm of the living, and he commanded : "Bring a scribe who is wise and learned. And there upon the scribe wrote all that Arda Viraf said ; he wrote correctly, clearly and explicıty".

This is how the prologue of the Zoroastrian work, *Arda Viraf-Namak* ends. Further on the text narrates about the "journey" of the devout Arda Viraf in heaven and hell, about all that he saw there, about the reward to the righteous and the punishments to the sinners for their deeds on this earth. When passages from this "Book of Arda Viraf" appeared for the first time in translation in an European language in 1816, the scholars discovered with surprise that the subject matter of this work resembled that of Dante's *Divine Comedy*. Already, at the time, an opinion was expressed that Dante was possibly familiar with one of the variants of this Iranian work. Later, this view did not gain much ground, but the discussion on the sources of the *Divine Comedy* has been continuing right to this day.

It is quite possible that oriental works with their subject matter close to that Zoroastrian book of Arda-Viraf had been known in Europe before the time of Dante. (It is a known fact that the literature of medieval Europe had borrowed many images and themes of the Arabic literature and,

through it, of the Persian and Indian. Of course, the *Divine Comedy* of great Italian poet, Dante Alighieri (1265-1321) is in its character and ideological content, completely original. Dante embodied his poem with the images of his time. It reflects the world outlook of his time and is, at the same time, permeated with new ideas and ideals which raised the spokesman of the Renaissance above the religious scholarstics of the medieval period. Any talk of comparison, therefore, of the *Divine Comedy* with its supposed oriental prototypes can be there only in the context of the resemblance of its thematic outline with some of the details of the description of hell and heaven.

The theme of the hero's "visit" to the other world has been treated in oriental literature long before the period of Dante. The distinguished Soviet scholar of Iranian studies, E. Bertels, and the British Arabist, R. Nicholson, took notice of the great resemblance of Dante's *Divine Comedy* with one the poems of the Persian poet, Sana" (late 11th-early 12th century). The title of Nicholson's article was explicit enough— "An Iranian Precursor of Dante". But accounts of the "journey" to hell and heaven have however been existing in Iran far earlier than the period of Sana'i and have been connected with the Zoroastrian religious tradition.

The *Arda Viraf-Namak* describes events supposed to have taken place during the reign of Sasanian Shapur II (A.D. 310-379). Zoroastranism was then passing through a difficult time ; disbeliefs and heresies were widespread. The Zoroastrian priests therefore selected Arda Viraf, the devoutest among them, and "sent" him to the other world so that, on his return, he would confirm that there does exist hell and that recompense after death depends upon the unfliching observation of the writs of the Zoroastrian faith.

The *Arda Viraf-Namak* was composed not earlier than the 6th-7th centuries. The scholars have therefore assumed that the work is purely apocryphal and has nothing to do with real events of early Sasanian period. But new discoveries in this connection make us re-examine the issue. Recently, the French scholar, P. Gignoux, was able to decipher one of the

inscriptions of Kartir, the religious and political leader of the 3rd century A.D. when the Sasanian empire was being built as a powerful rival of Rome and Byzantium. The chief of the priests, the "guardian of the soul" of the king of kings, Kartir, played a prominent role in the creation of the Zoroastrian state church. In his inscriptions Kartir mentions his many "services" as to how he revealed to the people the meaning of the doctrine of "heavens and chasm of hell". How Kartir understood the "essence of hell and heaven" becomes clear from his inscription in Sar-Mashhad (near the city of Kazerun in Iran), analysed in detail by P. Gignoux : Cartir describes his "visit" to the other world, where he was able to see for himself the Zoroastrian gods and the blessed life of the righteous, and heaven and the neither world.

Thus, in his official inscription, Kartir—the real historical personage and the political leader of the great power, — attributes to himself those "deeds" for which, much later, the Zoroastrian tradition glorified Arda Viraf, who believed to have lived in the A.D. century (that is, a centry after Kartir). But the purpose of both the accounts was the same—to strengthen the dying faith, to reinforce the position of Zoroastrain religion and church. In his inscriptions Kartir also refers to the spread of dangerous heresies, of faith in false gods, and mentions that, thanks to his activity, "many people who were unfaithful...embraced the true faith", namely Zoroastranism. Obviously, it was not easy for Kartir to achieve this : He had to resort to the drama of his conjectural "journey" to the other world. Kartir employed archaic and extremely primitive religious notions for his political aims. The text of Sar-Mashhad inscription has survived only in part, and many details of Kartir's "journey to that world" remain obscure. But even the extant framents mention what precisely he saw in heaven and what his journey was like then. The account is in the spirit of the traditional Zoroastrian conceptions of the world after death. Kartir is taken to heaven by a "noble woman"; she accompanies him while crossing the bridge. In heaven he sees great righteous men, the golden throne of god, the scales of justice.

Arda Viraf also "followed" the same path to paradise. The "Chinvat bridge expanded to nine-javelin-lengths ... and I crossed it easily, happily, courageously and triumphantly. I, Arda Viraf, was greeted by the mighty god, Mithra ... and other beings of that world. And I, Arda Viraf, also saw Rashnu the just, who held, in his hand, the scales of pure gold and weighed the deeds of the pious and the wicked. Then Sraosha the pious, and god of fire, took hold of my hand and said: 'Come on, we will show you heaven and hell, and the splendour and glory and ease and comfort and pleasure and joy and delight and gladness and fragrance which are the reward of the pious in heaven. And we shall show you the darkness and confinement and ingloriousness and misfortune and distress and evil and pain and sickness and dreadfulness and fearfulness and hurtfulness and stench in the punishments of hell, of various kinds which the demons and sorcerers and sinners receive".

The *Arda Viraf-Namak* also describes the "departure" itself to the other world. Experienced priests perform ritual rites; Arda Viraf prays; he is brought three pitchers of wine and narcotic; he swallows these out while continuing to chant the prayers. At last he falls unconscious; his soul "goes out" of his body and "flies off" to the distant region so as to return again, after seven days, to the lifeless body after seeing heaven and hell.

The magical rite described here automatically reminds us of shamanizing despite the belletrized form of the description and a totally different historical and cultural environment. It is true, shamanizing here takes place not in a tent or any another special place for the shaman but in a temple of fire. On the return of his soul, Arda Viraf not only describes what he has "seen" but also dictates his account to the scribe. This does not, however, change the essence of the ritual action. The "journey" of Arda Viraf is the "sojourn" of the soul in the other world. Similar notions are also reflected in Kartir's inscription. The body remained on the earth; Kartir's "double" travelled in that world. Along with the guests wives of Arda Viraf unceasingly guarded Arda Viraf's body abandoned by

the soul "for seven days and seven nights". The northern shamans also had special assistants (often wives), experienced in the ritual, who "guarded the body of the shaman at the time of journeys" of his soul. With their chantings they were also required to "help" the soul of the shaman to return to the body. Of special interest is also the name of the "sacred drug" taken by Arda Viraf before falling into the state of trance, namely, "bang", the ancient narcotic of priests and shamans.

Extremely important is the route followed by Kartir and Arda Viraf in their "journeys" to the other world. The souls of both "crossed" the chinvat bridge. According to the *Arda Viraf Namak*, the soul of Arda Viraf set off for the Chakat-i-Daitik mountains and Chinvat bridge. Chakat-i-Daitik (Mountains of Right Judgement) is a symbolic name for the sacred mountains of the ancient Iranian (and general Aryan) mythology used in later Zoroastrian works. According to the Zoroastrian texts, Harburz (High Hara) is the same as Chakat-i-Daitik ; the Chinvat bridge is "located" at the foothills of Harburz (according to the *Avesta*, too, the Chinvat bridge lies at the highHara).

Thus, also in the Sasanian period, the Zoroastrian priests, at the time of their religious rites, made "flights" to the same place where the ancient Indian munis and *rishis*, flew, to the sacred mountains (Meru-Hara) lying in the distant north at the Milky ocean. Thus an analysis of the Sasanian incriptions and early medieval Zoroastrian works yields new materials for recreating the ancient religious and mythological conceptions of the Indo-Iranians and corroborates once again the inference about the common Aryan origin of the themes of the "northern cycle" studied by us.

Mythological and religious conceptions of the Indo-Iranian tribes during the general Aryan period have been recreated by the scholars by a comparative study of the traditions surviving amongst the various Indo-Iranian peoples in the historical period.

After the "Aryan association" had been lost, various groups of the Indo-Iranian tribes developed already in various geographical and historical conditions ; the process of formation of their religion and culture was not identical.

"...Primitive religious conceptions, in a greater part common to each related group of peoples, develop in each people, after such groups are divided, in their own way, according to the conditions of life falling to their lot"*. Many old beliefs and archaic conceptions, in the new historical environment, at a different level of development of the society, continued to survive along with the freshly emerged, principally different ideas and views. "...Once emerged, religion always preserves a certain stock of conceptions, inherited from the former times..."**

The ancient myths and legends of the Indo-Iranians reflect "nature and...social forms, already processed in an unconsciously-creative way, by the fantasy of the people."*** Along with this, primitive magical beliefs and purely mythical conceptions have also co-existed with elements of rationalism. As pointed out by V.I. Len'n,"the linking of the *germs* of scientific thought with fantasy..." is characteristic of mythology.****

The cosmological and mythological views prevalent amongst the Indo-Iranian tribes found wide reflections in their religious beliefs and cult. The conceptions of the "northern cycle" were closely related to those archaic forms of Indo-Iranian religions which can be considered "shamanistic", but the same conceptions are followed even in such developed religious systems as Buddhism and Zoroastrism. Apart from the purely religious sphere, the "northern" themes are also represented in the mythological material proper, in cosmology and epos.

A comparative study of all these data enables us to speak of the existence, during the period of the joint habitation of the ancestors of the Indo-Iranians, of the following system of inter-related concepts : Far to the north of the territory of the ancient Aryas and provinces of their northern neighbours was located the land of fabulous beings, an impassable, dismal and dark land. Further on were mountains stretching from the west to the east and rising to the sky ; luminaries revolved around their summits. Beyond the mountains was the great watery expanse—the "Northern sea" or "ocean". At the summits of the mountains and on the shore of the "ocean" was the abode of the gods, of the "blessed" and of the souls of the

dead—a domain of favourable climate and light (though it lay beyond the land of darkness and cold) ; there, the sun rose and set once a year, the day and night each lasted for half-a-year.

In this common basis of the geographical and cosmological concepts purely mythical features are combined with real data. To the latter belong the reports on "polar" phenomena. Authors of ancient legends linked these with lands located beyond the boundaries within which the Indo-Iranian tribes dispersed, i.e., far-off in the north, in regions inaccesible to man.

Now it is possible to give a completely definite answer to the question as to where from did the Aryan tribes receive their knowledge of the "polar" lands. They got it from their northern neighbours. In the course of the long period, the Indo-Iranian tribes remained in close contacts with the ancestors of the Finno-Ugric peoples ; contacts involving various fields of economic activity, special relations, material and spiritual culture. These contacts resulted in the formation of notions belonging to the cycle studied. Some of the analogous motifs can, it would seem, be regarded as typologically similar, but the available facts speak of a direct link between the themes of the given circle. This is shown by the detailed parallelisms, going back to the remote period, in the whole range of characteristic notions and mythological images, and also principally important linguistic evidences, correspondences of words relating to the circle of notions of the "polar cycle", in different Finno-Ugric and Indo-Iranian languages (names of the mythical "sea" and "wind"; names of personified Northern wind, "mountains" ; and names of sacred mountains and of ecstatic drugs which, in particular helped the priests to carry out 'flights" to sacred mountains and Northern ocean).

Thus, the ancestors of the Indo-Iranian tribes "familiarized" themselves with sacred northern mountains, Northern occen, "polar" phenomea. In the same way, much later than the general Aryan period, already in the Scythian times, the "northern" themes of the Scythian mythological tradition continued to be reinforced by reports on "polar" regions.

Conclusion

ARAB TRAVELLERS AND SCHOLARS AT THE VOLGA

Reports on the people dwelling in the lnd of a six-month night were known in Scythia. These reports, according to Herodotus, used to be brought by those Scythians who had gone as far as the Argippaeans. Ancient scholarship owed its earliest knowledge of the "polar" phenomena to these reports coming in from the Scythian world and to the Scythian mythological tradition.

More substantial data about the peoples of the Eurasian steppe and their northern neighbours were obtainable again, many centuries later, at the time of the golden period of the medieval Arabic scholarship. Of course, the population of of the said territories had, by that time traversed a long road of considerable economic and social progress : the trade and cultural relations, as also the contacts with states of the Near East had become far closer. All the same, some legendary accounts of the northern regions, like the ones current earlier in the ancient Greek and Roman tradition, did continue to survive even during this period.

Particular curiosity of the Arab scholars was aroused by the information about the unusual astronomical phenomena which, it was believed, could be observed in the land of the Bulgars (a state formed in the early 10th century on the lower reaches of the river Kama and neighbouring areas round the Volga), that is, roughly on the same territories through which the route to the Argippaeans lay during the

Scythian period. In the 14th century, the well-known traveller, Ibn Battutah, specially travelled to this city of Bulgar [Bolgary] "to see for himself", as he writes, "what had been related of it as to the extremity of the shortness of its nights and again of its days in the opposite season on the year". Ibn Battutah also refers to the "land of darkness" located far to the north of the Bulgars.

Long is the way on snow and ice to that land which itself is desolate and dark. No one enters these parts except powerful merchants ; and even when some merchant ventures thither, he takes with him vast surpluses of food, drink and fuel, because "there are no trees, no stones and no inhabitants there". Reaching the land of darkness, the merchants, leaving their wares, withdraw ; and when they return, they find other goods there, in exchange. And none, Ibn Battutah observes, knows who these people of [the land of] darkness, who trade with southern merchants, are. [None knows whether they are] jinas (demons) or human beings, for "none has ever seen them". The land of darkness is also mentioned by other Arab authors who place it to the north of Yugra (the territory of the Ugrian tribes at Northern Urals and Pechora).

The accounts of the northern lands as given in the book, *Travels to Volga*, by Ibn Fadlan, are of special interest. In A.D. 922, as a member of the embassy from Baghdad, Ibn Fadlan travelled to the land of Bulgars where, in his words, he saw "many marvellous things". Ibn Fadlan begins his narrative with the account of the natural phenomenon which amazed him—"the struggle, in the sky, between fiery and black horsemen". Modern scholars have affirmed that this is an eloquent description of that impression which the aurora borealis made on the Baghdad diplomat. Ibn Fadlan also gives a detailed account of the amazingly short nights in the land of the Bulgars which are amazing for a southerner. Evcn in the darkest time of the night, he writes, complete darkness does not set in, the "red dawn" does not disappear ; in winter. the day becomes as short as the night in summer, and the morning dawn almost coincides with the evening twilight. Ibn Fadlan heard from the Bulgars that, beyond their land, far off in the

north, there lived the people "Visu" ("Ves" of the Russian chronicles), where the night is still shorter and lasts than an hour.

Ibn Fadlan also gives other accounts heard by him in the land of the Bulgars about the exiraordinary people dwelling still further to the north of "Visu". In the words of "Visu", these people are separated from them by the sea and live on "some is lands"; they are surrounded by mountains and none "of the human beings can penetrate into that region". The works of some other Arab authors also reflect accounts of forest tribes about the "people" separated from the rest of the world by high mountains and living on the shores of the northern sea. The Russian chronicle, under A.D. 1096, has also preserved a similar report about an unknown people dwelling to the north of Yugra, beyond the highest mountains which reach the sea. The path thither is unapproachable, and nobody "ever reaches there".

The Arab travellers and scholars observed surprisingly short nights in the areas round the Volga and the lower reaches of the Kama. In these very areas they learnt, from the oral accounts and folk legends, about the distant northern land of perpetual darkness and, at the same time, about the regions where there is virtually no night in summer and about the mountains reported to be located at the Northern ocean.

ANCIENT LEGENDS COME TO THE AID OF SCIENCE

It was from these very areas again that information about the lands where the day and night lasted half a year each is filtrated to the North Black Sea region and Hellenistic world during the Scythian period. Is it a matter of mere chance that, in the ancient times and in the early medieval period, information about the "polar" phenomena penetrated to the southern countries from the area lying on the middle reaches of the Volga and the lower reaches of the Kama ? Obviously, the steppe tribes (from whom such information poured to the anciedt Greek and Roman world) of precisely this area were in the closest proximity of the tribes of the forəst zone of the North. (In the areas more to the west the

boundary of the forest zone was much further on to the south.) And much earlier, already in the period of Aryan association, the Indo-Iranian tribes in these very areas had received "information" about the "polar" phenomena from their northern neighbours. "Arctic" details were merely a part of the "northern cycle" of ancient Aryan mythology ; many other themes were also linked, in their origin, to the legendary and partly even real notions of the cosmological and mythological system of the ancient peoples of the northern forest zone. Accordingly' there are all grounds to assert that, for the ancestors of the Indo-Iranian peoples, the whole circle of "northern" notions examined by us could be formed only if there were direct contacts with those tribes of the North who lived near the Arctic regions.

Such an inference based on the analysis of the ancient legends enables us to draw a number of important conclusions of historical nature. First, it is possible to outline more specifically the unknown ancestral home of the ancient Aryas, denouncing the theories which place the "Aryan ancestral home" in India, West Asia, Iran and Afghanistan, Central Asia, or in the areas at the Danube and Carpathia. There remain therefore the stepe territories of the South-Eastern Europe, Kazakhstan, Southern Siberia, but even this list can be subject to further amendments.

And once again the subject matter of the myth comes to the aid of science. Constant and definite basis of the whole Aryan "northern cycle" is the great mountains extending from the east to the west and located to the north of the territory of Aryan tribes. Judging from the ancient Greek and Roman tradition, the notion prevalent in Scythia was that the earth "is raised to the north". A similar view is reflected in the ancient Indian epos (the "raised upper side is the North") and forms a part of the general thematic cycle about Meru, like that about the Rhipaean mountains in Scythia. It may therefore be assumed that, already in the cosmological system of ancient Aryas there existed the notion that the land is gradually raised to the north.

Such an assumption is further corroborated by another motif of the same cycle fixed in the traditions of the Indians,

Iranians and Scythians : All great rivers of the earth flow from the sacred northern mountains. In the Scythian world this mythological notion influenced also the real geographical views—the Scythians believed that the rivers of their land had their source in the Rhipaean mountains.

And the view prevalent later, in the post-Scythian period, was that the great rivers flowing through the steppes of the South-Eastern Europe carry their waters from large mountains. Already in the medieval times, the west European geographers and contographers assumed that in the northern part of the Eastern Europe, there was a mountain range stretching in the latitudinal direction, where the large rivers falling into the Black and Caspian seas have their source. This erroneous view began to lose ground only from the 15th—16th centuries onwards when real information was obtained from Rus. Such a view resulted from the information which, in the course of long time, had been coming from the southern regions of Eastern Europe and, in many respects, went back to Ptolemy's *Geography*.

As compared with the Scythian period of 7th-4th centuries B.C., the well-known ancient geographer of the 2nd century A.D. reflected in his work, qualitively different level of geographical knowledge. Ptolemy depended largely on concrete evidences of the traders who had travelled to Sarmatia. And, nevertheless, on his map, to the north of the territories of Sarmatian tribes, in the latitudinal direction, are located large mountain ranges, and on them are the sources of Borysthenes (Dnieper), Tanais (Don), Rha (Volga) etc. Unlike his predecessors, Ptolemy already knew about the main tributary of the Volga, namely the Kama, and the place of their confluence, but he charted the sources of both the rivers from the large northern mountains. Still more remarkable is the very name of modern Volga as given by Ptolemy—"Rha", connected, as established by scholars, with the ancient Iranian "Raha". According to the Avestan tradition, the semi-mythical river, Raha, flows from the great Hara mountains. Accordingly, the data quoted by Ptolemy were based on the data obtained from the Iranian speaking tribes of South-Eastern Europe.

Thus, the formation of the "northern cycle" of ancient Aryan mythology must have taken place only where, in vast territories, rivers flow from north to south, and the relief of the place is accordingly raised from south to north. Such a geographical requirement is not fulfilled either by the territory of Central Asia (whose great rivers carry waters from the south-east to north-west ; and no ocean and regions with "polar" phenomena are there beyond the ranges of Tien Sham, Pamir and Hindukush mountains), or by the areas of Europe situated on the Danube and on the rivers which flow to the Baltic sea, or by the regions of Kazakhstan and South-Western Siberia—the Ob Irtysh, Ishim, Tobol flow in the direction reverse to that sought for and their sources lie not in the north but in the south and south-east.

Of the whole vast territory within whose boundaries the modern scholarship permits to locate the "ancestral home" of the Aryas, there are thus left only the regions of the South-Eastern Europe—from the Dnieper to the Urals. In all this space the relief of the place is actually raised from south to north ; the rivers—Ural, Volga, Don, Dnieper—flow from north to south, and their sources are lost in the far-off north, in the regions already directly unknown to the ancient inhabtants of the Steppes.

We are led to such a conclusion by the analysis of the "northern cycle" of Indo-Iranian mythology. This conclusion conforms with the view of some scholar who have also located the "ancestral home" of the ancient Aryans in South-Eastern Europe, and is well consistent with the whole complex of data which are now available to scholars—the materials of linguistics, history, archaeology, ethnography, and folklore studies.

Of course, the remotest history of the Indo-Iranian tribes remains obscure in many respects. Scholars have also to answer the question when and which routes did these tribes disperse from their "ancestral home" to West Asia, Iran, Central Asia, Afghanistan, India.

Some Iranian speaking tribes continued to inhabit the territories of South-Eastern Europe ; and here, in the Scythian period, was formed a distinctive culture, which exercised a

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> A peasant's plaint prolongs his dubious date.
>
> (Byron)

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